This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

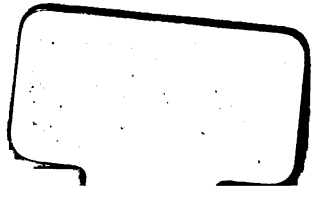
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

6000789574



STRANGE WATERS.

A Novel.

BY

R. E. FRANCILLON,

AUTHOR OF

"OLYMPIA," "PEARL AND EMERALD," ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY AND SON,

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.

1878.

[*All Rights Reserved.*]

251. e. 579.

CONTENTS OF VOL. III.

BOOK III.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER		PAGE
VI.	STEFANO CARALDA	1
VII.	ALCHEMY	19
VIII.	NECROMANCY	38
IX.	FINIS CORONAT OPUS	56
X.	MUD-LIGHT	74

BOOK IV.

I.	A DELPHIC ORACLE	94
II.	BLASÉE	113
III.	CHI LO SA?	134
IV.	A REAL PRINCESS	154
V.	EAGLES AND FLIES	173
VI.	A LITTLE RIFT	195
VII.	FEY	216

CHAPTER		PAGE
VIII.	BEFORE THE BATTLE	239
IX.	THE WEIGHT OF A BOUQUET . . .	260
X.	'ARIA DIVENGO, E FUOCO' . . .	281
XI.	AFTER ALL	300

STRANGE WATERS.

BOOK III.—*Continued.*

CHAPTER VI.

STEFANO CARALDA.

WALTER GORDON need not, after all, have been so shocked by Prosper's notion that a genius like the composer of Comus should not be allowed to pass from the world without leaving something behind him, if only a song. It is a simple law of political economy that supply follows demand so surely as night follows day. Suppose a mountebank makes a sudden sensation by the skill with which he dances the fandango after the amputation of one leg, straightway half-a-dozen one-legged dancers appear to share the harvest, as if six people had been simultaneously practising the

art of one-legged dancing for years; and they are lucky if, at less than a week's notice, somebody does not cut them all out by dancing with no legs at all. And then, as they came in, so they all go out together, and none can tell whence they came or whither they go.

And, if he had thought for a moment, he would have recalled to mind the posthumous history of many another great musician, as well as of many a great painter, who did enough for fame but not quite enough for the needs of trade; for it is noticeable that, as in the encyclopædias, so in real life, Art and Commerce go hand in hand. Of course it would be better if a dead musician could still be kept writing, especially as he would cost so little; but the arch-magician, Commerce, has never yet been balked by such accidents as death or the non-transferable nature of the human brain. There is a great deal of Mendelssohn about that people would not think much of if they knew who composed it; and Schubert never heard his own 'Adieu.' Songs of Schubert were wanted in Paris—Presto! a new song by Schubert came. Music by the composer of Comus was wanted

in London, and surely what a French tradesman has done a French tradesman may do. Walter Gordon had as much right to be shocked as if, on entering the wine trade, it had been proposed to him to improve good wine by giving it a better label. These things are so well understood, and the result is so satisfactory to all concerned, that only cynics and a few other simpletons dream of fault-finding. A good bush needs no wine.

Prosper, as a man of experience, knew that the nephew of a great musician is by nature a man in whom need rhymes with greed, and who is absolutely certain to be keeping back a few choice specimens of his uncle's genius till market-time comes. It is far better, as a rule, to deal with an artist himself than with his nephew. The spirit of trade, like the gout, is apt to come out all the more strongly for having been suppressed, wholly or partially, in a generation. But the success of Comus was so great that it would be worth while to drive even a hard bargain; and meanwhile there was a great deal to be said in favour of finding somebody who would be to Andrew Gordon what the unknown Russian

song-writer was to Schubert. But now his speculations seemed to have taken another turn.

'Charming!' suddenly said the opposite door-post, or at any rate the particular habitué of drawing-room doorways who happened just then to be its mouthpiece.

Prosper started from his reverie.

'Charming? It is superb.'

'Professional, of course? One's always safe from amateurs at the Quornes'—at least, from common amateurs,' continued the door-post.

'Fifty pounds, at the very least,' said Prosper.

'What—a song? On an evening? She's somebody then?'

'A song? You call it a song—Grand Dieu! Fifty guineas a yard, if it is one halfpenny,' said Prosper, with enthusiasm.

'What, do they pay for their music by the yard?'

'And what is more, they never make it, none such, now. Miss —— Ah, your English names never stay between the ears. It is unique—I must see.'

'What was she singing?' asked another amateur near the stair-head.

Most of Lady Quorne's non-professional friends were 'amateurs'—that is to say, in English, people who love music so dearly and so jealously that they hate one another.

'"Dolce amor mio," said the first amateur, languidly; 'out of Zelia.'

He had scored one. His rival had not recognised a well-known air—a terrible misfortune for an amateur.

'Ah, of course—hum, hum, tum, tum, tum. I've sung it myself scores and scores of times, in the other key. Of course—"Dolce amor mio," from Brunacci's Zelia. Hum, tum——'

'I beg your pardon,' said the first. 'I've sung it myself, in the real key, and it goes tum, hum.'

'Hum, tum——'

'Prosper, which did Brunacci write: hum, tum, or tum, hum?'

'Ah, you think Brunacci did write "Dolce amor?"' said Prosper. 'Brunacci wrote "Dolce amor," so much than God Save the Queen. He write Zelia? Bah! No more as Comus—no.'

His mind could not leave its groove. Has the story ever yet found its way into print of how Stefano Caralda, the lazzarone, seized hold of all Italy by its ears? It ran in those of Prosper from the moment he found that, while he had been appraising lace, he was supposed to be listening to 'Dolce amor.' Brunacci was the only modest musician ever known. One day he laid a wager that his name was his only merit, and that, if he put it as a label to the veriest rubbish, that rubbish would be swallowed as if it were musical nectar. But he had his believers, nay, his worshippers—a strange accident for a modest man. The wager was accepted—it was ten thousand scudi. Brunacci was not only modest, but rich withal—a stranger combination still. That there might be no doubt about the rubbish—for he was honest into the bargain—he picked up the first lazzarone he could find on his way to Santa Lucia, and offered him five soldi—that is to say, sixpence—to make a song in one hour. The lazzarone grinned, scratched his head, and asked for a day—and the day ended in 'Dolce amor.'

Brunacci stared. Not only had his lazzarone made the song, but had written it down, with pens, ink, paper, harmonies, and all. But he had assumed that it must be rubbish—so rubbish it must be. He put his name to it—it turned into wildfire. He demanded his ten thousand scudi.

'No,' they said. 'You have put your name to a chef-d'œuvre.'

He opened his eyes—it was true. Never even had the composer of La Festa di Gioja made a more exquisite melody. He made another expedition towards Santa Lucia, and found his lazzarone, as before, lying on his back and staring at the sky.

'What is your name?'

'Stefano Caralda, eccelenza.'

'You are a musician. Write me an opera.'

'It is written, signore.'

'Let me see it?'

Stefano Caralda pulled out a manuscript from—somewhere.

'But you are a genius. This must be heard.'

'As you please, eccelenza.'

Stefano Caralda never moved from his back, or took his eyes from the sun.

'I will do you a good turn, Stefano,' said the modest and honest maestro. 'I am the great Brunacci.'

'As you please, eccelenza.'

'I will bring out this opera of yours as my own. That will mean fame—for you. I will write some stupid stuff, and bring it out as yours. That will mean—a few scudi for me. No matter how; and as to the scudi, we will go shares.'

'As you please, eccelenza.'

Zelia surpassed even La Festa in honour and glory. And then the great Brunacci, like an honest man, ascribed the fame to Stefano Caralda. But people pointed to some rubbish published under Caralda's name, and said:

'The man who wrote this, never wrote Zelia. Zelia is his who wrote its finest air—"Dolce amor."'

Brunacci grew weary of contradiction—perhaps he grew convinced himself that it was so, in time. What can one man do against the world? And so the great Brunacci grew yet more famous, and yet more rich, while Stefano Caralda, the lazzarone,

dreamed of unheard music, and lay on his back and stared at the sun. Both, I think, were content—but I am sure that Stefano Caralda was the more content of the two.

'And oh,' thought Prosper, 'if I could but find a Stefano Caralda!'

Meanwhile, John March was sitting once more—alone. And, for the first time, he felt lonely. It was not altogether because the work of his life was done—that was a matter of some weeks old now. Nor was it that Celia was away for an evening. At least it could not have been so, for she had been away for years at Lindenheim, and he had never missed her. But want of thought for the mind, and of even external companionship such as Celia could give him, left his brain swept and garnished for other thought-devils to enter in and dwell there.

What had made him keep that bit of lace all these years, and yet so much out of sight, that hunger had not sufficed to call for its worth in gold? He had never so much as looked upon its fairy-tissue that had been spun for a queen since the day when he had carried off

his child from her mother. It was sacred to none but evil memories. The first time he had set eyes on it, it was worn by Noëmi Baruc on the Corso. In effect, it had been her wedding-robe—a strange one for a beggar-girl. It was a film of the moonlight under which he had said to her, 'Come.' And what had made him think of this treasure, hoarded without a reason, when the child took the rôle of Cinderella, that had been laid down by her mother years and years ago?

Let it be remembered that his heart had been resolutely closed to every feeling that came without a passport viséd by the brain for five-and-twenty years. And in such a state hearts are apt to fancy that they have committed suicide. He had never let one emotion, save just indignation, come between himself and the work to which he had given body, brain, and soul. But was it only that his heart had but been packed up with the veil in a trunk, and that, when it first felt the outer air again, it felt, first, blind and dazed—then desperately alive? The light of heaven is too strong for eyes that have for too long been closed.

When Celia left the Row for the Lane he had given her just one quick look before she started, and no more. No; she was not like her mother, except in the eyes, and in a slightly un-English tint of skin; and that she might have owed less to the Ghetto than to the Border-tents from which the first vagrant Gordon had presumably come. But he could not forget how Noëmi had looked in the moonlight through that very mantilla; and a sort of horror came upon him as he realised that he had sent Celia out into the world in the fatal dress of Noëmi. He was the last man on earth to have superstitious fancies; but how could he forget all that this mantilla had meant to him? It was the visible symbol of all that he had brought up Celia not to be. When a queen first puts on her robes, she first feels and knows herself a queen. Character clings to clothes, and character is destiny. He would sooner have dressed Celia in the robe of Nessus than in the veil of Clari. It felt like the outward proven knowledge that his work and his life had failed; that art, as represented by Celia, was doomed to end as a prima donna after all.

And, if his work and his life had failed, what then? Simply that he had thrown away all that makes life worth having on the thinnest ghost that ever flickered out of dream-land. Supposing that he had been content to love Noëmi for her faults and flaws, as men love women and not as artists think they love ideas. She was beautiful, yet unconscious of beauty; passionate, yet docile; and with an infinite capacity for joy. With all her flaws he might surely have made something out of a living woman; and what, with all its glories, could he possibly expect to get out of a dream? Of course, compared with high art, the perfect companionship of a far better wife than Noëmi is a thing not worth regarding. What does it matter what becomes of a man in comparison with what he can do? But yet—he drew a deep sigh, and felt desperately alone. Of course with all his heart he hated Clari. But better a dinner of herbs where hate is, than a stalled ox and loneliness therewith.

There was Celia. But, somehow, it never occurred to him to think of her. People are apt not to pay much regard to what lies at

their feet when they have got a trick of star-gazing.

It cannot be said that he heard the door open, for obvious reasons; but being alone —he was not applying a mental microscope to his score—he saw it open and Muir enter.

He did not look pleasantly at his visitor. In the first place he remembered him without knowing him; and, in the second place, the intrusion of the raw-boned young Scotchman disturbed his dream. It was an idle dream —well-nigh a desperate one; but there is a tenderness about a dream of any sort that makes it cry out when broken. 'What shall I do with my life?' is a terrible question at times, when some human creature is tempted to believe that all is vanity. That, however, settles itself; but 'What have I done with it?' was the burden of John March's dream with which Muir jarred. He was a man who looked as if he never dreamed.

Nor did he, though one instance has been recorded to the contrary. Nor did he look as if he were thin-skinned, or minded a welcome both silent and dry. He filled his pipe, and

sat down by the fireplace opposite to John March. Under the circumstances, silence was not remarkable; nor was smoking an uninvited pipe with a neighbour an unheard-of occurrence in Saragossa Row. Neither the Reform nor the Carlton is so great a club-house as poverty where the black ball is unknown.

There is not only an actual, but an occult, significance in physical size. The pluckiest schoolboy recognises the right of inches without a battle, and the boy is the father of the man. The certain result of an impossible battle underlies the social intercourse between man and man, just as surely as the uncertain issue of a possible amour underlies that between man and woman. If the comparative size of Muir and of John March had been reversed Muir would not have dreamed of sitting there. As things were, John March never thought, despite all his irritation, of driving him away.

Presently—

'You—are—a—musician?' scribbled Muir.

John March read the note, crumpled it up, and threw it where the fire should have been. The action was not without dignity; but it

signified only too pathetically, even to Muir, the conscious impotence of a man who feels in himself a strength that is curbed and chained. That is the worst doom of the deaf, the dumb, and the blind.

'I—am—a—pupil—of—Maurel.'

John March stared at the second communication blankly.

'I don't know anything of Maurel, whoever he may be. But I know that music ought to mean manners, if nothing more.'

Muir, forgetful of his national motto, remained as patient as a lamb.

'Maurel—was—an—aurist. He—used—to—say—"Nature—and—health—are—lovers; the—surgeon—is—their—peacemaker.'"

'And—what the devil are my ears to you?"

For all answer Muir took from his breast-pocket a small twisted tube, of which he carefully polished one end with his sleeve.

John March was a man of sufficiently strong will, as his whole life had shown. The score showed that, and all its history. The will of the man who has but one idea must needs be concentrated essence of will, and of won't also.

But Muir, too, was a man of one idea. And what must happen when such men collide?

Ask any schoolboy—the man of inches wins. We may not have yet come to measuring music by the yard, though it is just as good a standard as any other; but we measure by it a great many things that are just as intangible. Muir's one idea was the aggressor just then, and the smaller, older, and physically weaker man had to give way. There was something in the touch of the surgeon's bony fingers that made him as lamblike in submission as the surgeon himself had been in patient serenity.

And suppose there were hope after all? He frowned, and submitted sullenly; but he made no attempt to disturb the speculum in its operation. And, so long as his patient kept quiet, it was absolutely indifferent to Muir whether the quiet were gracious or no. He removed the tube so as to arrange the light better, and then recommenced his examination.

The case must have been difficult, or Muir unready at diagnosis, for the examination lasted long enough to give downright pain.

But pain spurs the will, and gives hope something definite to hold by. John March might not be able to resist his surgeon, but he might restore his self-respect by resisting the pain his surgeon gave. He bore it as unflinchingly as it was given—and then, if the experiment ended in actual hope after all! Meanwhile Muir treated him as if he were a piece of wax-work, and not the least more delicately. Would he have been quite so rough if the ears had been Celia's? Perhaps not; but it had been another axiom of the great Maurel:

'Tender hearts never knew a heart—timid touches never probed a wound. The more knowledge, the better care; and the deeper knowledge, the more pain.'

John March was too deaf, Muir too absorbed, to hear the clock strike or the creaking door turn on its hinges. And yet the clock had struck one, and many minutes had followed after, when Cinderella returned, without her mantilla having turned to rags or either of her feet having lost its shoe. It is true that midnight is no longer so late as it used to be.

'Hush! Good-night, and thank you,' she said, hurriedly, to someone behind her, and then stood still just within the room. Whatever adventures she had gone through that evening she forgot them all in the picture of hope that she saw before her, as represented by a raw-boned young Scotchman probing an old man's ear with a speculum. Anxiety contemplating Hope would have been the subject for the sculpture, and, for once, Anxiety would have been the far fairer figure, as she stood there, flushed with excitement and fatigue, hardly daring to breathe lest she should spoil the work of this heaven-fallen surgeon.

But the picture of still life lasted barely a minute. Celia felt her mantilla nervously clutched from behind, as if someone were about to tear it from her shoulders.

'Hush!' she exclaimed impatiently, and in an agony lest some crucial test should be marred.

But all the world seemed deaf. Her 'hush' was as unheard by her invisible companion as by the patient or his doctor.'

'I have know it—I have know her—I have know he! It is him, per Stefano Caralda!'

CHAPTER VII.

ALCHEMY.

PROSPER'S exclamation did not disturb the patient, because it was unheard; not even Celia's entrance interrupted the young surgeon's hand or eye. He continued his inspection as steadily as if there had been no intrusion. Celia instinctively put out her arm as a bar against Prosper's entrance farther into the room. Anyone but a Frenchman would have taken the hint, and gone; but the politeness of the great nation is proverbial. And the truest politeness unquestionably consists in never feeling oneself in the way. It had already required the very sublimity of politeness to insist on seeing Celia home from Park Lane. Any man can be polite enough

to see a girl home who accepts his protection; but it is only a Prosper who has such a fund of chivalry as to put up serenely with avoidance and snubbing rather than fail in one duty of a gentleman.

But, after his first excited exclamation, the picture of still life froze even his mercury, and he waited behind Celia to see what was next to happen. Muir was the first to move. He removed his speculum, rubbed it absently on his sleeve, and then first seemed to be aware that there were others in the room. He bowed to Celia; or rather nodded, for his place of birth had given him nothing in common with his compatriot Sir Pertinax, and his place of training little in common with Prosper—saving always his want of being able to feel himself in the way when he had an object to serve. John March had certainly been quite as much his victim that evening as Celia had been Prosper's.

Celia's look of hope, too intense to dare to be itself, sent the blood from his heart to his face; a girl's possible emotions had not entered—out of a dream—into his single-hearted investigation of John March's ears.

The room seemed to him to be suddenly divided into two hostile camps—science and ugliness on his side, grace and beauty on hers; Prosper being only in the dark background. He groped about in his mind, not for scientific assurance to give himself, but for unscientific hope to give to her. There was a look in her face that he knew he should kill by saying what alone he had a right to say; and he, who was willing to give surgical pain enough to satisfy the theories of the great Maurel himself, shrank from hurting that look as much as if it had been a healthy dog or child. He groped farther and farther into every corner of his mental resources that he might find hope where none was; and meanwhile, with that supreme disregard for hours which distinguishes Saragossa Row, sat down by the fireplace and thought so hard for Celia's sake as to forget she was there, or how her eyes were trying to follow his thoughts into the recesses of his brain.

A moment when all were intent upon their own affairs was obviously the very time for Prosper to interest them in his own.

'Signor Stefano—Monsieur March—ten

thousand pardons,' he said, addressing the released patient with dignified patronage; 'mademoiselle your charming daughter tells me you are a musician. Of distinction? Ah, that goes without to say. When one is musician one looks musician; it is in all the air—what you call the eyes, monsieur, and the nose. Ah, it is a bad, bad land for the music, this England,' he said, looking round the sorry, cheerless room and thence to Celia in her point-lace, and thence to John March again. 'It will give a woman what she will, who devours twelve great green oysters all at once, and it will leave a musician—of distinction—to starve. Eh bien. What would you? It is the costume of the land. I congratulate myself ten thousand times of to make acquaintance with mademoiselle, your so charming daughter. She sings like an angel—ah, "Dolce amor mio!" But what would you? An angel shall come down from the cloud, and no one shall listen if she have not Prosper. I am Prosper, monsieur.'

John March was looking at him intently, and listening with all his eyes—the highest compliment that a listener can receive.

Prosper waited to observe the effect of the last announcement, and was amply satisfied.

'Yes; I am Prosper. It was not for nothing that mademoiselle has had the pleasure of meeting me chez Milady Quorne. She is good; she reminds me a little of Clari. It is me which made Clari; it is me which can make mademoiselle. It is nature what gives the voice; it is art what gives the train; but it is Prosper what gives the pay. Aha, monsieur? We shall be better friends, you and I. It is the music of England who makes the people in a rage now—in a fury. It is the Comus who draws. The time for England is come; I am a Man of the Time. If it was the music of the Turks—prestissimo, signore!—there would be a grand Turkish opera, with Turkish singers—Ali, Abdallah, Fatima—on the stage. There shall be no Lucia; no Almaviva; it shall be John, and Dick, and William, and Joe. I know your names—ha? You are a pianist—violinist—drummer? No? Composer? Yes? All the better. All the world can play and drum, but not all the world can compose. I shall call in the morning, in good time. What

hour suits you? Ten? Eleven? Twelve? One?—No? Two?—Yes? Then it shall be two. Au revoir, monsieur. Felicissima notte, mademoiselle.'

And so, at last, he took his leave, having had no more idea that he was haranguing a deaf man who could not hear a single word than that he himself was dumb. There was an angry gleam in the maestro's eyes.

'Celia,' he said, 'we leave this house to-morrow. I choose to be where I can be alone when I will.'

Muir started from his reverie.

'Good-night,' he said abruptly, and was leaving the room when Celia suddenly put her hand upon his arm and looked up at his far-off face so wistfully that, just to have given another answer than he must, he would have let his father's creditors go unpaid for ten years more to come.

'Can he be cured?' cried Celia—'can you cure him?'

'Maurel could not cure him,' he blurted out, instead of finding the gentle way of breaking the bad news for which he was seeking.

'You—mean——'

An impulse of pity broke through his shyness; he took both her gloved hands in one of his own, and covered them with the other. They were cold as ice, the excitement of the evening had driven back all the blood to her heart, and anxiety held it there—the citadel needed all the forces it could muster. Except as a part of diagnosis, he had never held a girl's hands together like this before; and even now professional instinct made him look for the fever in her eyes that should harmonise with the icy hands.

'Go to bed, lassie,' he said, 'and sleep off the late hours. They'll be bad for you. As to the case—I never meant you to hope; and that's why I——but as it's done, it can't be undone. Nature's a strange woman, and most often she'll get people's ears and such-like into scrapes just to show how cleverly she can get them out again—but no; there's nothing to be done here. It would just be cruel to give hope where there's none. He'll be deaf to the end.'

'Celia!' said her father grimly.

Surely the Master seemed being blotted out of the world. He had been feeling it himself.

until his lonely reverie had been interrupted by the intrusion of Muir. And his feeling was well founded, beyond all question. 'Finis' had blotted him out of his life's work, and his life's work out of the world. Lady Quorne's invitation had practically released Celia from her slavery and his tyranny. The suddenly-remembered mantilla had turned what might have been into a lost reality—what had been, into a dream and the ghost of a dream. Even his loneliness was not his own. The Scotch doctor, the French impresario, all the world as two strangers seemed to one solitary man, came and went, Heaven knew why, as if the little bare room was an open tavern—except that it contained nothing to buy but a bundle of music-paper out of which the life and soul were dying out, slowly and surely, day by day. And now, Celia, in the very dress of Noëmi, was standing before him, with her hands as passively in those of a strange young man as if he were blotted out of sight as well as out of hearing. It was time for him to vindicate, not his will, but his very existence in common with tables and chairs.

'I thank you,' he said with saturnine politeness to Muir. 'I presume it is to your interest in Miss March, my daughter, that I owe the interest you have been pleased to take in my ears. You need not tell me I am past cure—I know that as well as you—and —well, that matters little. There is only one thing I ever wanted to hear,' he said with a backward glance towards the score, 'and that will never be heard. One wants no ears to sit by oneself and wait for the end. As you may perceive, I am not in need of any company but my own. It vexes me to the heart that I am unable to offer you at present a suitable fee for your professional attendance; but I am not in the habit of forgetting my debts, and I do not choose to be obliged to any man. I will take care that you shall not have to look back on more wasted time and labour than you need. And now, perhaps, you will add to your kindness by leaving me for a little while alone. It is not much to ask of any man—in one's own room. You will find the passage dark; I will light you to the stairs.'

'Indeed'—Muir was beginning; but he

suddenly remembered that it was of no more use to speak to John March than to the door. To have left hope behind him he would have given up ten—no, twenty years of fees. He felt a new and strange kind of tender pity for the girl who had to pass her days in looking after, and in the sole companionship of, this deaf and irritable old man. If he had only known the strong will that was seething with barren rage against impotence of sense he would have pitied her ten times more—almost as much as he would have pitied the man. A deaf musician—even Muir, to whom music was a dead thing, was almost beginning to comprehend what such words mean.

No, not even Celia could understand it all. Even to her it seemed as if the man who that evening had been living through the bitterest tragedy that this world of tragedies has surely ever known was rejecting out of savage ill-temper the one only friend whom chance had thrown in the way.

'My father has too much to bear,' she said to Muir. 'You had better go—you had better not come again,' she went on, with a sigh more bitter even than that with which

she had made her broken vow never to see Walter Gordon again. 'I—we—are grateful to you indeed—what can I say?' she ended, with the bitterest sigh of all.

'I know—I know,' he said, with his heart in his throat. 'You are a good lassie—and I know; I know.'

What did he know? He did not ask or answer the question as he went down the dark staircase one step at a time instead of his usual three; but, if he had, he could have answered nothing but 'Nothing.'

'Well—Celia?'

Think of what it would mean, to anybody but a skilled letter-writer or a practised journalist, to be called upon, at a moment's notice, to give a detailed account of a private concert at a strange house which had lasted four hours. The mere writing it out would require thought and time. Celia, writer of neither letters nor of articles, had to explain, moreover, what she had sung, and why; how it was that Prosper had seen her home; what had happened between her and Walter Gordon; what, if anything, was to come of her reintroduction to Lady Quorne. She

could only rest her pencil on her paper in sheer despair.

Her father waited for some moments in dead silence—and then, with tenfold force, his whole doom fell over him. Montaigne tells a story of how some conquered and captive king bore, with dry eyes and serene brows, his own defeat and dishonour, the loss of his kingdom, the sight of his sons led before him into slavery, of his queen and of his daughters dragged before his eyes into shame —all, till the long procession was closed by the sight of some mean slave driven by accustomed blows from the service of one tyrant, whose wages had been stripes, into that of another who gave stripes for wages. At that sight the royal composure broke down —he who had borne all the rest, without a sign of pain for his conquerors to scoff at, broke down and wept aloud at the sight of the slave, on whom he had never set eyes until now. It was a straw—but it had turned the balance; only a drop, but it made the cup overflow. John March had lived through his tragedy—it was not much that it happens to take a long time

to tell a long story. But it signified so much—the way in which both bodily disease and mental isolation condemned him to double loneliness—the solitude of silence without sympathy. Had he been on a desert island he could not have been so much alone —for even on a desert island is the company of winds and waves, whose voice is heard. Pictures are not a musician's comrades, if they are any man's.

The world had rolled round him, and was still rolling round; he had never taken part therein, and it was too late for a deaf man to begin. The opening of his heart before Muir's visit had been bitter suffering, and yet not without a touch of sweetness—for opening must mean relief, always. There was the dream of what might have been idle enough, but, in dreams, the idler the sweeter. But now he felt a dread so intense and so conscious as to be horrible—a dread without one faintest touch of sweetness to take away from its absolute horror. He literally felt the membrane of his heart petrifying, like that of his ears. You do not comprehend the sensation? So much the better

for you. People know what despair means, or at least they fancy they do; any way, they can define it after a fashion. But this was the step beyond despair. Despair is an emotion—this was the dread that emotion will be felt no more; the dread of a dead soul in a living man. What on earth was left for him to feel? Bodily hunger, perhaps—nothing more.

Still Celia touched the paper with the point of her pencil, pondering how to compress a thousand words into one, when, looking up for inspiration, her eyes were caught by a look on her father's face that made her blind to all else, so strange was it and so ghastly. The strong, harsh lines that she knew so well seemed to have taken new forms in the gray colour—the always dull eyes had turned into spots of pain. What was happening?

Celia sprang to her father's side, and seized his hands. She was more terrified than even her timid self had ever been; but for him, and no longer of him. He seemed rigid and unconscious. What was to be done? Had the surgeon's verdict been too great for him

to bear? Had he broken down under the strain of self-suppression? Muir!

It was an inspiration. Celia left her father in his chair, and sprang down the dark stairs. She did not know the surgeon's room; but divine instinct, always unerring when given free head, led her there. She knocked in an agony.

'Who's there? What is it?' said the surgeon, in a voice muffled by bedclothes.

'Me—Celia March. Come, for God's sake! my father is——' Dying was on her lips, and must have reached the surgeon as surely as if it had left them.

'One moment,' said the surgeon. 'Run up again; I'll follow you.'

Celia ran up fast; but, though Muir must have managed to find time to dress, he was hardly six steps behind her.

It may be that John March had swooned; and none can call it well that he had not swooned for ever, and gone where, if there be music, there are no deaf ears. But even now, Nature had done her work with her inveterate imperfection. John March was standing upright before his desk, pale as ashes, trembling in every limb, but despe-

rately alive. He was holding the back of his chair, as if to steady himself, but there was no weakness in the grasp.

'Here again?' he said to Muir.

'Thank God!' breathed Celia. She wrote hurriedly: 'I—brought—him—because—you—were—ill.'

'I am not ill. Bring me my score. I mean,' he said, as if consciously grasping truant wits and forcing them back to their duty, 'I mean, leave me alone.'

Celia looked her question of Muir, 'Is it wise?'

'Wait till he goes to bed, and don't speak to him. It's been a faint; but if you want me, I'll not be in bed, and I'll run up at the first word. Don't be down-hearted, lassie. You were right to fetch me; but I'll not be in the way till you want me again.'

'This is beyond bearing!' said John March, so soon as the door was closed again. 'I can't even close my eyes but I am waked up by all the world. I do not choose to be made a sight of, and to be made a subject for every medical student to try his hand upon. I will be left one thing to have my way in. Lock the door. No—I shall sit up; but I will be alone.'

He sat down by the fireplace. Was he

going to sit there all night? thought poor Celia. Was he really going insane? It was not for her to comprehend, even had she known, the sense of impotence that makes children of the greatest men, and makes them feeble just in proportion as they are by nature strong. But she could not disobey the doctor. She was wearied out with all the things of that night; her veins were burning and her whole heart was tired. But she took out her poor little account-book once more, and, dressed in lace that a queen would have found dear, tried to bring all her wit to bear upon the fact that the six shillings of a week ago had dwindled down to one; while how much they were now in debt to Mrs. Snow, who could tell?

One shilling—and she heard the wolf at the door. And she had just come from among lords and ladies in Park Lane, dressed in lace that——

At least she could put off that piece of irony, and attend to such accounts as hers in the more fitting dress of Cinderella before the advent of the fairy godmother.

Her father was still gazing at the bars of the grate, not even smoking. Tobacco con-

soles, but the smoker who is beyond comfort instinctively lays it by. As she took off the lace, something white, she saw, was fastened to it which had not been there when she put it on.

Surely all the godmothers in Fairyland were abroad that night, or never. They had sent her the lace, the gloves, the cab, just when they were wanted. And now the howl of the wolf at the door grew fainter, as she unpinned, from a fold of the mantilla, an envelope for Miss March containing a bank-note for five pounds.

Five pounds is little enough; but it is great enough to make all the difference between rich and poor. But how had it come there? Not by accident, for there was her name. She examined the hand; it was unknown. And it was so cunningly fastened to the magic lace that she might have worn it unknowingly all the evening for aught she could tell. She examined the envelope more closely, and read under the cover: 'A loan. When you can, pay it back to whom you will.'

Which meant: When you are rich, repay the lender by giving it to the poor. Who was this unknown wolf-chaser? Prosper?

But in that case he would have signed his name with a flourish—a trumpet flourish—at the end. Her heart beat. Who could it be but Walter Gordon?

The thought reconciled her to the gift. For no Lindenheimer scruples to take help aus Lindenheim. Fellowship in art may have few merits, but it has one—one may take without loss of pride, and give without fear of being refused. And surely no fingers but the cleverest in the world could have contrived this delicate piece of legerdemain.

There was no use in wishing that it had not been. Pride is of course a virtue, although we pretend to call it a sin. But, after all, a girl who prefers her own pride to her father's life would be very unlike Celia. She would be infinitely more heroic; but then Celia never had the making of a heroine. And it was so natural to be helped by Walter, that—well, the sweetness of that thought perfumed even such a thing as a note for five pounds. It may be better to give, but only a special grace enables one to receive.

'Yes,' she said to herself, as she kissed the note, 'I will pay back the loan.'

CHAPTER VIII.

NECROMANCY.

NOTHING has been said yet of Celia's actual début at Lady Quorne's. And for the best reason in the world—namely, that which prevented Israel in Egypt from making bricks without straw. The bricks resulted ; and so, likewise, resulted certain consequences and new combinations of pieces from Celia's début. But, of the main, central fact, that Celia March had stood up in a roomful of strangers and had sung Brunacci's Dolce Amor Mio, nothing can be said, because there is nothing to say.

She had been too excited at heart to feel any especially new flutter when Lady Quorne, sweetly and graciously, talked to her for a few

moments about herself, then, without giving her a minute more than was due to any single guest, turned the talk on songs in general, then upon Celia's répertoire in particular, and finally chose Dolce Amor for hearing out of some half-dozen others. Lady Quorne had consciously and diligently cultivated the art of patronage, and was so anxious to feel at home with artists of all denominations as to make the shyest feel as much at home with her as Lord Quorne was with his cucumbers. And then a blaze of unaccustomed lights, and the full play of unfamiliar eyes and voices, are by no means the worst sort of sea for a timid débutante to set sail in. It is a wonderful help to the shy to feel that if they fail their utmost, even to the point of utter breaking-down, not a soul present will heed or remember. As to Walter — from that day at Waaren she had never thought of him but as holding her hand, so that she might put her feet upon the loosest-looking stepping-stones without fear. It is true he had never as yet done one single real thing to help her; but he always gave her the impression that he could and would if there were need. So she sang;

and with as much credit to herself as anyone can fairly expect whose name has never been in the newspapers so that people may know what, and how much, to think or say of them. One does not go through even the form of applause in drawing-rooms.

'Thank you,' Lady Quorne had said; 'I hope we shall hear you again very soon indeed.' 'She really has merit,' she said to Walter, 'that protégée of yours and Reginald Gaveston's. There is something about her—in her style, I think—that reminds me of Clari. Only she hasn't the superb voice, poor child. Ah, we may talk of art as much as we like, but voice is the great thing after all.'

And perhaps the criticism of Lady Quorne was as just as any could have been. It was absolutely true about the voice. Celia's was sweet and clear enough—Walter was wondering how it was that he had ever thought it anything less than the sweetest and clearest in all the world. But it had no pretensions to that profuse glory of tone and volume that gave people wings and carried them away. Celia must please, might charm; but Clari electrified. In only one point was Lady

Quorne wrong in her comparison. It was not that Celia reminded of Clari, but Clari of Celia — to any who had minds to judge with, instead of a mass of newspaper paragraphs in place of brains. Thanks to the terrible training of Deepweald, confirmed by the sound traditions of Lindenheim, while Celia's voice might be but of silver her song was all of pure gold—every touch, tone, note as absolutely true, every phrase as delicately just, as if she had been a perfect instrument played on by the very muse of melody. It was the great prima donna who only now and then rivalled the débutante by some golden memory of her days of slavery—when she, too, had her John March in Andrew Gordon, and her Deepweald in Tuscany. Celia was divine art, Clari divine nature; and it must take a cleverer critic than Lady Quorne to decide which is the more divine.

Which Walter Gordon thought the diviner now, goes without saying. He did not contradict the Countess of Quorne to her face, nor even waste argument upon so manifest a matter. He took care that Mademoiselle Art, who in this respect singularly resembles

Madame Nature, had something to eat and drink, talked to her on the neutral ground of Lindenheim—only a little less volubly than when they were there—avoided cross-questioning her more carefully than if he had known her less, and laid an elaborate plan for seeing her home. But there had proved a limit even to his ubiquity; he had too many acquaintances to allow of his confining himself to one special corner all the time, and, when the time drew near to end the evening and he looked for her, she was gone, and had not left so much as her slipper behind her.

With all the stupidity of a lover—for even that symptom had come upon him—he asked himself over and over again, as he punished himself for missing her by walking home in the early morning rain, in what way he could possibly have offended her. He had not carried away with him a single relic from the evening—not so much as the single petal of a single flower, to serve for the slipper of glass; indeed, for that matter, her fairy godmother had forgotten the crowning gift of flowers among the gloves and laces. For of course every man who is really in love as-

sumes that, when a girl runs away from him, it is because she dislikes him. Those who are not in love are of a different opinion; but who should know a game so well as the players? 'Well,' he thought with a sigh that took the shape of a ring of blue smoke in the air, 'she has reason. I never answered her last letter that I got at Rome from Lindenheim. I never thought of her till I met her by chance at Deepweald. I have let her drift down, and down, and down, to Muir's Row—and with that deaf tiger! Good Heaven! what has she not gone through, while I have been eating, and drinking, and flirting! I have been a selfish scoundrel. I have been a false lover. I have been a brute. I have been a fool. No wonder she thinks of me what I deserve. Perhaps, though—any way, I can but try. From this moment—from the instant I throw away the end of this cigar, I will be everything I ought to be. I will. I've never tried to will anything yet—I must have an overwhelming supply of will in store somewhere—the accumulations of years. I'll go straight to the Row to-morrow, and ask her to be my wife, then and there. She'll see that I'm in

earnest then. And if she won't—I'll make her.' And, so saying in thought, he made a tremendous effort of will and threw away the end of his cigar.

It did not occur to him to question how it happened that a girl from Saragossa Row should have come in lace that had made a connoisseur stare, and in gloves that could not have fitted her better if he himself had bought them. But then, after all, he was but a man. If daily papers spring up like mushrooms in the morning, as most people believe; if prime donne had come into existence full-blown, full-grown, and without a history; surely such things as gloves and laces may do the same. Tobacco is a vegetable, he knew; and, for any experience he had to the contrary, it grew in the form of regalias.

But he was, in spite of himself, honestly in earnest about Celia. It was the first time in his life that he found himself in love without intending it, which is in itself a strong and healthy sign. But why in the world does the simple statement, without going round and round to get to it, that a young man found himself in love with a girl, wear such a

strangely old-fashioned air? The psychology and the physiology of love—if I may still, for want of a better, use so simple a word—have been so minutely examined that such phrases as 'To fall in love,' or 'To be in love,' without elaborate studies to differentiate the process in the particular case from the process in all other cases, sounds like saying that Julius Cæsar became emperor without telling how or why, just as if it were as simple and everyday an occurrence to become emperor as to wear a pair of gloves at an evening party. No; it does not do to say that John fell in love with Joan; though it would have been ample enough in the days of long ago when people were content with facts, and, instead of imitating the dissecting-room, had never thought of applying the scalpel to healthy minds in healthy bodies. Why and how did John fall in love with Joan? And within what limits and conditions? Why did he not love Mary? and what was the difference between John's passion for Joan and George's for Anne? And why was there this difference, and how far? And would he have loved Anne if there had been neither Joan nor Mary? And why?

And, if not, why not, or how otherwise? as they ask in Chancery.

And, as duly as the interrogatories of modern romance have been asked, so duly shall they be answered; and in French to boot, to be in the fashion.

Je t'aime.

There is the whole science—psychology, physiology, metaphysics, alpha, omega, and all the rest of it, of the whole matter—voilà le chameau; now, always, and for ever. And I will defy Schopenhauer himself to dig deeper or to say more, so long as he deals with a subject who has the brain in the skull and the heart healthy and on the left side.

Walter Gordon was on the very point of starting for Saragossa Row when the servant announced 'A gentleman.'

'Did you say I was in?'

'Of course, sir.'

He swore, as audibly as one can to one's self, at the ill-luck that had prevented his starting just two minutes earlier. But there was no help for it; if he was in, he was in, and the

gentleman might result in the portrait of one; or he might be that duke or dealer whom the painter is always expecting, and who has even been known to come. However, five minutes would suffice for any gentleman.

He entered; and it was strange that Walter did not swear audibly enough for John March himself to hear. It was Prosper. Happily, Walter had his hat and gloves on; and he took care to keep them there.

'Aha! you have been waiting me? You have look through your drawers? You have found a song—one? Two? Three songs? An opera? Ah! you paint? Very good; I will see the opera.'

'I would show you the opera with pleasure, but——'

'Ah! I was sure it was a whole opera. I knew a man like Andrew Gordon could not die and leave nothing in the drawer. You have been quick to find; but that does not import to me, not at all.'

'But I was going to——'

'To fetch him? Ah, I see you go out of the door—never mind. I will go with.'

'To say—there is no opera; not even a

song. And, as I have an appointment, you'll excuse me, I'm sure.'

'Not a song?'

'Not a note even.' Walter was getting vexed, and forgetting to answer with his usual good temper. 'If Andrew Gordon is to write anything new, it must be in his grave, with a dead hand. You had better do as I told you—call him up out of the grave. You must excuse me now. Good-day.'

Prosper frowned slightly, and regarded him as if he were a new order of being. A nephew who could not supply when an uncle was in demand was no doubt strange to a speculator in musical wares. What is the worth of fame except for the sake of posterity?

'Very well,' he said at last. 'Then I shall call him up out of the grave.'

Walter felt startled for a moment in his turn. Whether Prosper meant anything or nothing, he spoke with all the solemn gloom of a necromancer who has really learned the art of calling the dead to life again.

The impresario had lived too much behind the scenes not to know when he had made a hit.

'Out of the grave, monsieur,' he went on, feeling his rôle. 'Yes—I am wizard, I. I say Clari shall be—she is; I say Clari shall not be—she is no more. I say Italian opera shall die—it dies. I say Andrew Gordon shall live—he lives, monsieur! Yes; I shall call the composer of Comus from his grave.'

'Ah, what a splendid season we might have! While you are about it, call up Mozart, let him write an opera. And give the parts to Farinelli—Pasta——'

'Bah! to Bagatelle—to Rococo. It is Comus who is in vogue. I will not give one halfpenny for your music of a periwig. Au revoir, monsieur.'

There is no such thing as thinking of one thing at a time. An upper and an under current of thought incessantly flow together, the upper making the noise, the lower out of the light of reason and apart from immediate needs and actions.

Walter Gordon was carried impatiently by the upper current that ran through brain and heart to Celia and Saragossa Row, and tossed aside Prosper as a queer kind of rascal no

weightier than a casual straw. But it is just the straws that sink deepest into the under-stream, the Avernus of thought, and show its course like the wind's. Reason heeds little enough the pompous boast of a charlatan that he will bring back a dead man to life. But at any rate such boasts are so far impressive that they are not everyday things; and they lose nothing by being delivered in a solemn voice, in an outlandish accent, and with an air of conviction.

The unknown fate of his unknown uncle had always, as he had told Celia at Waaren, exercised a special fascination over him. It had even affected the rolling course of his life by giving him hereditary reason for his taste for free Bohemian air. The composer of Comus had always been the hero of his imagination from the time when he first heard the story of how, in the very hour of a sudden and startling triumph, Andrew Gordon had fled from its scene to Italy, had disappeared there, and had never been heard of again. He had died, of course. Living men from Manchester, or elsewhere, do not let their fortunes slip from their fingers. But

there was just enough element of doubt to give his unquestioned and unquestionable death the romantic character which belongs to the deaths of Don Sebastian, of Arthur, and of Barbarossa, of whom tradition has always said, as Prosper of Andrew Gordon, that, when their time is come, they also shall come again.

By vallum kept, and fossa,
And subterranean spells,
Deep slumbers Barbarossa
'Mid phantom sentinels.

* * * *

From right to left the raven
Wheels round the secret mound
Where, in a dream-light haven,
He slumbers underground:

From left to right the ravens
Some day shall turn and wheel,
And traitors turn to cravens
Before old Red-beard's steel.

Not Dolce Amor Mio, but this fragment of a German Volkslied, was singing through him as Celia's lover drove into the lamentably unromantic and unaromatic street called Saragossa Row.

He knew that evil days had fallen on the star of Lindenheim. But nobody knows the

very eyes of Poverty except her children; and he had never dreamed of picturing the newest lady of his heart in such a bower as Mrs. Snow's bakery proved to be. He had never met with her save amid picturesque surroundings—the courtyard of the Gewandhaus, the Rosenthal, the quaint homeliness of The Golden Lion, the stateliness of Hinchford, the cathedral close of Deepweald. To save her from this was the duty, not only of a lover, but of a knight and a gentleman. Love, pity, and romance, all at once, walked into the baker's shop and asked if Miss March was at home.

Mrs. Snow said yes, with a benign and meaning smile. Naturally, Miss March had not gone to Park Lane for nothing; and if not for the sake of one sort of spoons, then for another.

Walter's eyes were quick enough; he liked neither the benignity of the smile nor its meaning.

'Is Mr. March in?'

'Oh yes, sir. But you needn't mind him. He was took faint last night, and he's as deaf as a stone wall at the best of times, and

deafer, if it's true stone walls have ears. Leastways he never hears when he don't want to hear, which is bad for people that asks for money. But you don't look much like a dun. If you want to see the young lady, he'll be deaf enough though, I'll be bound, just the same as if you were. Third-floor front; you can't mistake, if you follow the stairs.'

'Twas no business of mine,' she explained afterwards to her friend. 'If people can't pay their own weekly bills their own selves, it's only right they should get hold of them that can. So long as she don't fleece the doctor, it's naught to me.'

'She mustn't remain here a day!' thought Walter, as he went upstairs. He had not made matters worse by trying to explain. He felt his heart beat at the door of the third-floor front. He tapped, and opened it. Nobody was there.

It was a relief, however, since Celia was absent, not to find her father in place of her; and he could wait till she came in. It certainly was a room that made his heart sick to think of in connection with Celia. It was

past pathos even. Poverty in relation to her, if it meant anything, meant the graceful poverty that expresses itself vaguely by means of flowers and canary-birds. This room spoke rather of the master-spirit of the father than of the daughter. There was, it is true, the lace mantilla thrown over the chair, the relics of Celia's preparations for last night—symptoms of untidiness that touched him, for he knew of old that a place for everything and everything in its place was not one of her ways. There was an empty envelope too, directed to 'Miss March' in what he saw at once was a feigned hand. But, since he was no connoisseur at lace, the signs of the woman's presence were, for once, humble and few, creeping into corners and out of the way. There was no flower, no bird.

The obtrusive signs were the man's. The blackened meerschaum, with its long wooden stem, seemed to rule, and the main piece of furniture was an escritoire that appeared to have grown gray and old with labour. Before it stood a comfortless arm-chair. Upon it were an inkstand, with the ink dried up, and some quills with nibs split and splay. In

front of these lay some sheets of music in manuscript, fairly copied out and fastened together at the left-hand corner.

Music is public property, whether written or heard, as much as a picture, and Walter was still musician enough to examine a full score intelligently. The front sheet had a title-page: 'Cleopatra: Tragedia Lirica in Cinque Atti.'

'An ambitious subject,' thought Walter, 'and new.' He turned over the pages idly, then curiously, even though he was waiting for Celia. He was not a man to wait passively for anything in the world.

'But who on earth is to sing this? Malibran herself, if Prosper——'

His fingers had travelled to the last page. And there he read: 'Feci Andreas Gordon.'

CHAPTER IX.

FINIS CORONAT OPUS.

'Feci Andreas Gordon.'

What could it mean? It was not likely that there was a second Andrew Gordon in the world who composed operas. Had he really left a work behind him? And had it come into the hands of John March of Deepweald, ready to be produced just at the moment it was wanted? But just then his eye caught the date—it told him that Cleopatra had been finished barely four weeks ago.

He was standing lost in a maze of speculation into which a certain awe of unknown and mysterious impossibilities could not help intruding when he heard the soft half-rustle

of a dress, and Celia whom he was waiting for was in the room. But, for the moment, he had two hearts; one was Celia's, the other was mystery's.

The second, being uppermost for the moment, spoke first.

'Good-morning. . . . You are not astonished to see me, I hope—I suppose? I—I heard you were in trouble.' Somehow, the tables of Lindenheim were turned, and it was Walter of the cool head and ready tongue who was suddenly struck shy before timid Celia. 'Can I help you?' Perhaps after all, that was the best thing to say.

Celia's cheek was always ready to turn from pale to pink, or from pink to pale.

'Yes; we are in trouble. And—I thought I should see you soon.'

She had thought nothing of the kind. But she believed she had thought so, since he was here.

'Thank you—if that means I can help you I must, and I will. Lady Quorne must do something, and she shall—if—— I came on purpose to see you. I have been a very poor sort of friend to you; it was easy enough to

take care of you at Lindenheim. While I was waiting for you I was turning over this music. What is it? Do you know?'

'What—you have been touching the score!' she exclaimed in dismay.

'Why not? It is worth looking at; but I don't envy the soprano. Look here—look at this passage, and sing it if you can. Clari could not do that. What is it? I see it is called Cleopatra, but how did it come here?'

'The score? That is my father's great work—that he has been working at ever since I can remember anything.'

'Your father?'

'It was his life while we were at Deepweald. And now——'

'Celia—do you remember my telling you, the first time I ever saw you, of Andrew Gordon who composed Comus—the one great English opera that people are just beginning to recognise?'

Did Celia remember? Every word of the walk to Waaren was as fresh in her mind as her first hearing of Clari. The two things were the epochs from which she dated all things.

'You said you never heard of him—or of

Comus; and you say this work is your father's. See here—"Feci Andreas Gordon," and the date, not a month ago. "Composed by Andrew Gordon," that means—but what does it mean?'

If his cleverness was at fault, Celia's stupidity was not like to be any better for the purposes of riddle-reading. She dared to touch, with just the tips of her fingers, the terrible score which his hands and eyes had profaned, and looked at the words as if they had been Greek—which, though in Latin, they were to her.

'If it means,' she said at last, 'that the score'—she could not change its name at a moment's notice to Cleopatra—'if it means that, it would not be true — I mean, if it means that the score was composed by Andrew Gordon. It is my father's.'

'But—but suppose it means that Cleopatra was composed by both John March and Andrew Gordon——'

'But how——'

'Suppose that Andrew Gordon never died, but became—Heaven knows why—John March of Deepweald?'

Celia could never take new ideas, except slowly. She could only look bewildered at the score.

'I have told you his story a dozen times. We never questioned his death—never. But that was from circumstance; I never heard that there was any direct proof; it was not likely I should, but my father would know. And your father is not an ordinary man, Celia; and he may have had motives of which we know nothing, and a strong one it must have been; it is true he was cut off with a shilling before he—disappeared, as I have always heard. Have you never heard him speak of your mother, Celia?'

'Never. Never once. I never heard of my mother.'

'Have you never asked him? Of course not,' he added quickly, catching the look on Celia's face that told him, more plainly than words could, what the wildest thought of questioning John March implied to her; an idea beyond grasping, not by reason of its novelty, but of its preposterous impossibility. 'And you never remember any place but Deepweald. If your mother had died there

—do you know if your father lived there long before you remember ?'

Had she spoken her real belief she would have said, 'As long as the cathedral.' The cathedral, the score, and John March were one and indivisible to her.

'No? Do you know nothing of your father's former life at all ?'

'Nothing at all.'

'You had a mother—and she gave you her eyes. We are cousins, Celia.'

Celia was feeling faint, as before a general upheaving and confusion of all nature. We all have to distinguish between knowing and knowing at some turn of life—between knowing that a fact is true, and knowing that it is at the very root of life, and that if it were not true something would be gone that stands between us and such untheoretical things as happiness or despair.

Some day we learn not only that love, for example, simply is, but is for our own very selves; some day we find the river that we only knew of by knowledge actually carrying us down to the sea. If this were all true, human life, though at the commonest inlets,

was trying to pour in upon Celia. She felt it beating outside, and was too bewildered to give it any welcome but that of vague dismay.

The conclusion to which he had leaped startled even Walter. At least he felt that he should be startled so soon as he had time. A new element of romance took years from his heart, which, though he must be full eight-and-twenty, had not yet grown so very old. That not only should Andrew Gordon the Bohemian have been his hero, but that unheard-of Celia Gordon, all unknown, should have been his heroine; that two such diverse paths should have led them to Lindenheim, and then have circled round and round till they were brought together again at Saragossa Row—they had been strange currents of destiny indeed. All his best and strongest self went out to the heroine of his romance, of his heart, as he took her hand.

'Yes—it's as true as that you are you. You know nothing of your father. I know so much of my uncle that he may indeed have come to life again without black magic or miracle. Yes—John March is Celia Gordon's

father; my cousin Celia is Celia of Lindenheim. Were we not friends from the first moment we ever met? Not that that had much to do with our fathers being brothers, though. We are made ten thousand times nearer than they are. Do you know how I was drawn to you the first moment I saw you? It was as if you had been given into my charge when you first dropped among us all, like a frightened dove out of some unknown skies, among us starlings and jays. Well, thank Heaven, there is nothing to keep me from helping you now, all I can.'

'You have always been too good to me.'

'I? I have done nothing for you—not one single thing. I have been calling myself a blind brute every minute for the last ten days. But I know what things mean now.'

It was more than Celia knew. Indeed, this new kinship, which he welcomed as a direct way of bringing Celia into his life and of solving a thousand difficulties at home which he recognised and felt none the less deeply for ignoring and scorning them, put into her heart a root of bitterness.

So Walter had helped her because some

natural instinct of kindred had bidden him—that was all. She felt a dream, not quite flying away, but putting out its wings to fly. But then—after all, it was only a dream which had not even a name. The dumb pain that came from the spreading of its wings was itself so vague and nameless that she mistook it for a sort of ingratitude. Ought she not, for her father's sake, to be glad if all this were true? And, since Herr Walter believed it, true it must needs be.

'You have done all things for me!' she said with an eager impulse to make up in warmth of zeal for the shamefully and selfishly ungrateful coldness with which she had learned that Walter was so much nearer to her than her friend. For she was so utterly ignorant of what kindness means that she assumed cousinship and brotherhood to be more than friendship; as if accident were a closer bond than free choice, or to be named in the same breath with it. 'Yes — everything.' The tenderest light was coming into her face, for shame for ingratitude was not an impulse to make the shyest of girls ashamed; she felt warmth come into her own voice, and, for

once, let herself go. 'You have been the only friend I ever had. Do you know what that means to me? Of course that had to be over when you left Lindenheim—there was nothing you could do; and why should you? I never thought of it, indeed. I don't know, but it seems as if I had a life past helping, except by stray bits of sun like you and Lotte, that come out and go in again—but they do come! If only my father was made safe, I should be—happy. I should go to sleep, and not dream of pence. Oh, Herr Walter, do you know how I want to say "Thank you," as well as feel it all through and through me, and don't know how? Can you know without my telling? I don't know how to get words—I never did want them before. Thank you, for the sun.'

To live alone with a deaf man who had never talked to her even in his hearing days is no preparation for eloquence, nor to have lived for three years with two incessant talkers in a crowd, for expansion; and one's words at best are bound to be vague when one wishes to say 'Thank you' with one's whole heart for a golden mist, and can find no more defi-

nite and tangible peg for one's gratitude than a pair of kid gloves, a cab fare, and a bank-note for five pounds.

Celia could not mention these, especially the money. It needed no knowledge of the world to tell her that the most delicate way of taking a delicate loan is to say, as delicately as possible, nothing. But to Walter she had grown eloquent, and a very little expansion with her was doubled by its novelty. And all the more his heart smote him with shame at thanks that he had never earned.

'Celia,' he said very gravely, 'do you know —don't you know why I came to see you to-day? It was to tell you that I have been a fool. It has taken me five years to find out why you drove every thought of every other girl on earth out of my head from the first time we ever met—that day when we went to Waaren. Our being cousins had nothing to do with that, Celia. I have six cousins beside you. That morning I thought myself over head and ears in love with Ilma. You know I never spoke six words to her again. And since that day I have been rolling on, from nowhere to nowhere, and no woman has ever been nearer to me than Ilma was when I left Lindenheim.'

He forgot a rather strong flirtation with a certain famous prima donna not five months ago, and perhaps another parenthesis or two; but he forgot them honestly.

'And—when I met you at Deepweald, I knew why.'

It had been in truth much later; but love always antedates itself when it becomes self-conscious, and draws on itself at first sight as sublimely regardless of fact as any other forger.

'And ever since I have known better and better. I did not come to find a cousin, Celia; no, nor a friend. No, nor only Celia—aus Lindenheim. Do you remember,' he went on with acute incoherency, though with chronic fluency, 'that day? You had taken your first singing-lesson, when I met you on the way to the Golden Lion, and when——'

Celia, instead of flushing under this new outbreak of sunshine, turned pale; not like a hungry red rose, but like a white one for whom the open light is too strong. The wings of the dream on the verge of flight fluttered wildly, but not as if they were about to fly away. Her father's heart had opened and closed again, but hers had never opened;

and the effort was as painful for the warm breeze to enter as for the cold. Indeed, how can she, who only as yet hears the wind on the outside of doors and windows, tell whether it be from east or from south, till it has fairly burst the window-pane? At any rate, she knew one thing—that this was no flirtation *à la* Lindenheim. One may mistake the wind's quarter, but not the summer in one's own heart for mere spring.

'And when,' began Walter again, with one hand pressing down hard on Cleopatra, when suddenly——

'Good-morning,' spoke in a tone of deep, patient melancholy, a voice from the inner door—harsh, faint, and hollow, as if heard from farther still. 'I have long abandoned the theory that an Englishman's house is his castle, not to speak of his lodging. But those sheets are at least my own, and I should be infinitely obliged if you could find another place for your hands. I will not ask you to give me the pleasure of your company, because you will no doubt give me that so long as it pleases you. Celia, give me my pipe, if you are not too busy; and if Mr. ——, the doctor,

calls, tell him I am quite well, and mean to keep so, in spite of him. I don't suppose that will keep him out; only one can but try.'

With more than a sigh Walter had to accept the fact that this was his romance hero —this bitter, sour, grotesque creature, with a crazed brain, and suffering from impotent tyranny. What could he do? A deaf man may silence heart-speech by his presence as much as if he could hear the faintest whisper in the farthest corner. Celia had not spoken, save in the plain language that love alone can never read; and he could not, extemporising a speaking-trumpet with the sacred score, bawl out: 'You are my lost uncle—I love Celia—I want to marry her.'

Walter knew, by an instinct drawn from the only interview he ever had with John March, that for any one but his daughter to write conversation for him was to wound him sorely. He thought, Shall I write him a letter? So far, at least, as he thought of anything but his interrupted tête-à-tête with Celia. But then a letter would be both lame and absurd, and he had a chronic aversion to letter-writing, being human and of his own

time. And in any case he could not mention his discovery at the end of the score; he had been told, in so many words, that even his having laid his hand upon it was unpardonable profanation. He glanced at Celia; but he got no help there. She had turned away, and was folding up the mantilla.

Under the circumstances, no possible resource could have been brilliant. Perhaps that which Walter desperately took to was as little dull as any. He took from his breast-pocket, where chance had placed it and presence of mind remembered it, the last printed criticism of Comus—a piece of glowing praise. Print could not hurt the deaf man, and any musician was presumably interested in reading of the music that chanced to be going on.

John March read it through slowly, from beginning to end.

'I don't know why you show this stuff to me,' he said with grim scorn. 'So that wretched sham, that vile rubbish, is still on the boards? Well, I knew it would be an era in the degradation of art, and so it has proved. It is just as well to know that

there is more need of a reformer than ever—only it will make his work harder by five-and-twenty years; each year with three hundred and sixty-five nails in art's coffin. I'll show you what Comus is worth.' He tore up the cutting and threw the pieces where the fire should have been. 'I won't even degrade my pipe by lighting it with what a fool writes in praise of a charlatan. And so—if you care to know it—you know what John March thinks of Andrew Gordon.'

That one eccentric musician should despise the work of another, were that other Beethoven himself, was not strange; but that a musician should despise his own work, and that work the greatest and most famous of his time and country, should not even have heard of its triumph, and, when he heard of it by chance, should be thrown into a rage—all this was not strange: it was impossible. In the face of that, had he seen 'Feci Andreas Gordon' written a hundred times over he could not believe his own eyes. It must have been 'Feci Johannes March;' and his mind, preoccupied with necromancy, must have acted as necromancer. Surely,

had a true, great artist, Walter felt, heard of the revived triumph, after five-and-twenty years, of a true, great work, like Comus, his eyes would have flashed with the joy of living fame. No; that Walter's eyes should have deceived him was incredible; but this was impossible, simply and utterly.

He heard Celia say, without leaving the mantilla, 'Go.'

Fate had triumphed. The fools had been too much for one man, however strong, to conquer—raged the master within himself, as he fell into his old trick of striding fiercely up and down, lion-wise. Celia knew the mood and kept still. Comus revived, Comus triumphant—all the ruined hope, all the cruel disappointment, all the bitterness of a life, lost glory, wasted strength, lost love, concentrated in fifty lines of praise. It was more than mortal strength could bear. And meanwhile, there lay Cleopatra, never to be heard, to make sport for Philistines in far-off times to come.

Suddenly his eyes fell on Celia; he could not see hers, but one need not see tears to

know where they are. And through his rage came back the look of appeal thrown to her by Walter, and the downcast face that had not raised itself to answer him. Another man would at least have laid his hand on her shoulder or touched her hair. Not he. He laid hold of Cleopatra.

'Let him take her, or any man that can keep her,' he swore aloud, 'and the Devil take the score.'

And, in a second, the sole record of a life's work was torn once lengthwise, once breadthwise, and lay in four different quarters of the room.

Having thus pulled down his house of cards, he lighted his pipe with trembling fingers, and sought to exorcise the demon by smoking grimly. Celia dared not look, or think, or feel; had Deepweald Cathedral itself come down it would have been nothing to this. The windows that kept out the open air from blowing into her life had not been opened, but dashed to pieces by a storm.

CHAPTER X.

MUD-LIGHT.

CELIA had said 'Go' to Walter with her lips, and there had been nothing for him but to obey her. But he had not reached the bottom of the stairs when he heard the wave of her dress above him, and in another moment she was with him, out of breath and eager. Even she knew that this was no time to be shy.

'Pray don't think my father would be like this if he knew all! He does not know all you were to me at Lindenheim—how good you have been; he does not heed such things—he has so much in his life, without me. You must not come here again. Only you must know, please, that I know, and always shall. You do know, don't you? That's all.'

'I went because you told me, Celia; you don't suppose I was not coming again? I am just bewildered about your father; and I don't know what to think or do. I suppose my thoughts misled my eyes. The composer of Comus deny his own work—the one great English work?—no; that can't be. Well, there are such things as illusions; there's nothing strange in the eyes seeing what the mind is looking for. So we are not cousins, Celia. Never mind. I did not come to look for a cousin—no, nor for a friend. I have something to say to you—I must say it now. You have on your things, I see. Will you come out for five minutes? I can't say it here. I wish—I wish Saragossa Row was the Rosenthal.'

'Yes,' said Celia with a sigh, 'so do I.'

'For just five minutes—will you come?'

Celia's pulse did not beat one whit the faster. She was relieved to find that Herr Walter had not misunderstood her 'Go;' and his asking her to go out with him had once been so natural, that her obeying him as a matter of course was merely a piece of an old habit revived. She felt like doing wrong;

but what else could she do? And she felt intensely stupid—but that was no new phase of hers, and intensely happy with absolutely no shadow of reason. It was so strangely like old times, as she took his arm; like going to sleep for a minute, and dreaming some lost dream over again. She did not notice that Walter did not speak a word till they had passed out of the Row, had crossed a bridge, and were walking slowly along the river, more than five minutes away.

'Celia,' he said at last, 'I have brushed Cleopatra clean out of my mind. You don't think I've been thinking of that all this while, I suppose? What have I been thinking of?'

'Lindenheim?'

'Well, yes; Lindenheim. That's the background, any way. Were you thinking of Lindenheim too?'

'I think so.'

'But I was thinking more of now. Just look at the river there. If there's one lovelier colour on earth than another, it's the colour of mud, when it turns silver-grey at the end of an afternoon. Don't you think so? The Grand Canal is a fool to the Thames.'

How he would have stared if, after that walk to Waaren, some Prosper or other magician had foretold that, some five years hence, he, Walter Gordon, should feel shy before Celia. But so it was; and even so Time had its full revenge. The truth is that first love is first love, come when it will, and that a hundred flirtations, or a thousand, will but take off its edge. Every man will prove 'fey;' the timid man bold, and the bold man shy. If he could only have been conscious that Celia's own blood was running one grain more swiftly than the mud below, then he would be at ease; but Celia, with miraculous perversity, was both as slow and as calm. She was simply and honestly thinking mud-colour, under that special aspect, very beautiful indeed, and wishing that the minute gathered back from the lost old times would last for at least one hour more.

'Celia, I have been thinking about you awfully—terribly. And of myself, too. Do you think I want to save you out of this horrible life of yours only because I'm your friend? I want you, Celia. Nothing more. I want all life to be like Lindenheim—for

you and me. I want you to be my wife—always . . . . . Wait—don't speak, if you're not sure. I can wait five whole seconds, if you like,' said the man who had waited five whole years. 'But—Celia!'

She knew he was looking up at her, though in mere literal prose he was looking down—that is to say, his imploring 'Celia!' and the look that went with it were, in better truth than prose knows, upward, for they were prayers. What had come to her? Her gossamer dream of love had been spun all too fine for it not to tremble as if before breaking at such unheard-of words as these. That she should ever hear such had been as undreamed of in her life as a Phœnix chicken is by a barn-door hen. She almost felt as people when drowning are said to feel by those who have never tried—as if Deepweald, Lindenheim, Hinchford, Saragossa Row, were all confused in one chaotic Now. Was she the very Celia who had heard Reginald Gaveston read 'Locksley Hall'? So inappropriate and incongruous were the Nows and Thens that came together.

'I can't—I don't know—I don't understand!'

Walter's heart gave a leap forward! Once more, he felt, they were in the proper relation of Walter the absolute, and Celia the shy.

'But I know, dear! I believe, in my heart, you want me—all I can be to you. I know I want you, and everything that you are. I don't think even your father will think of a No, when he knows. I don't expect you care for me much—yet, that is to say. But I'll make you, if you'll let me try. I love you—and you're the only girl I ever loved.'

Some sprite as incongruous as her memories must have inspired Celia, in her longing for some word, to stammer out:

'Not Lotte?'

'Lotte!'

'Nor—Ilma?'

'Ilma! Good Heaven, Celia! if you hadn't reminded me, I should have forgotten their names. As if there were a ghost of love in a Lindenheim flirtation. No; I loved you then, if I had only known. And now—don't you want me to live for you? Don't you want to be lived for, poor darling, for whom life is so hard?'

'Please, we must go back now.'

'Look here—Celia! You must say Yes first. Will you, Celia?'

No; Celia was not stupid altogether, to misquote the old song that ran in Walter's head after the day at Waaren. The slowest growing blossoms, after their first wonder at themselves, must find out at last what all the sunshine means; and so must Celia. The silver-grey of the mud, and the sun setting in the coal-smoke, as if trying to copy Turner and ignominiously failing, took upon them the ideal atmosphere that changes landscape into Turner, and a heart-dream into glory. He want her? Well, he had said so, he, Herr Walter: and therefore it was true.

But one does not say Yes just when one feels like Celia.

'Celia!' implored Walter again, taking the ungloved hand, spoilt years ago by straining after octaves, that still lay on his left arm.

'Good-afternoon!' said Muir.

Now, it is the very first rule in the only guide-book to etiquette worth reading—to wit, that which has never been written—that when you see a young man and a young

woman engaged in a certain sort of conversation of which the symptoms are unmistakable, you must look hard to see what weather it is going to be to-morrow, and pass by on the other side. There is but one law of politeness: Do as you would be done by. The only possible excuse for the surgeon is that never, to his knowledge, having had a woman in his own head, he was unaware of what he would be done by in the like case, and probably assumed that Walter Gordon and Celia March were engaged in discussing what might concern reasonable people in a world where, if one has not one's father's debts to pay, one has at any rate one's own, and where there is a great deal of heart disease—endocarditis, cyanosis, angina pectoris, and so on. Walter was far more polite. Had he disturbed a talk of this kind, he would have asked for no greater justice than to be knocked down; and, on the principle of doing as he would be done by, longed to inflict equal justice on his friend. The Thames a fool to the Grand Canal, indeed! Why, what sort of river can that be where, in spite of all the glory of the greyest mud, one cannot speak out one love-

word without being interrupted by a Scotch doctor? It was an outrage. After waiting five years, was he never to have five minutes with Celia alone?

'How is your father, Miss March?' asked Muir. 'I have not seen him to-day, because I was thinking irritation would be bad for him.'

'Confound him! he can think himself in the way, then?' thought Walter. And thereon a new feeling woke up in him for which all the experience of Oxford, Paris, Jena, Lindenheim, and Rome together had failed to prepare him. Without being exceptionally vain, for one may have a great deal of vanity in one without being vainer than one's fellows, he knew himself to be better-looking than Muir; and indeed a racer who does not know himself to be a finer-looking animal than a cart-horse is less modest than stupid. And, for that matter, the man of his type who can see what any woman can see in any other man, is not, and never has been. And yet where love is, jealousy will somehow manage to intrude, like Muir himself upon Walter and Celia; and the less cause his presence

has, the more certain will his intrusion be. Did not Muir live in the Row? Had he not daily access to his patient and his patient's daughter? Was there not the sympathetic companionship of common poverty? How much might not Muir have been helping her, while he, Walter, had been holding aloof and doing nothing? That Muir was over head and ears in love with Celia went without saying; for, when there is but one woman in the world, all the world wants her. It is surely an unaccountable thing that Nature, who makes all her dumb creatures more beautiful at love-time, should delight in making the eyes of reasonable men dull and their wits blind, and make them feel themselves looking their worst, without help, in the only eyes they care for.

Celia felt as when she had first heard Clari sing, and when she woke from that new world to the need of going home. Had she said 'Yes?' Had she looked it, without a word? She could not tell—only the light went out of the air, and she knew that something more terrible had happened even than having heard Clari sing. And yet there was

still all the light in her heart that had gone out of the sky, and—but how can one say, or paint, or sing even, the joyful pain of innocent sin, the courage of fear, the ignorance of knowledge, and all such things as words only darken, and song turns to unfathomable prose?

'He is better, thank you,' said Celia, with mechanical composure.

The three turned back together towards the bridge, for it was evident that, whether Walter led Celia onward or back, Muir was going the same way; and, in any case, Celia knew that there was but one way for her. None of the three said very much; there is no need to say why. When they reached the Row—

'Good-bye,' said Walter, humbled and a little crestfallen, to Celia. 'I will see you again to-morrow. I will write too, perhaps; but I must see you, any way. Muir, where are you going to dine?'

Celia escaped at last, and did not wait to realise what had happened, even for a moment, before going straight to where the deaf musician was sitting in the midst of the ruins

of Cleopatra, smoking with a stoical serenity which had not yet given way. She did not observe what had happened to the score. Kingdoms, nay, even the Cleopatra itself, might fall in ruins, but there was that in Celia which is only called blind because it is too far up over the stars to see what lies so far away below. She had not paused to feel, even, because she was afraid of being afraid. Not a moment must be lost; her father must know at once that the end of the world had come. Oh, if the deaf ears could only hear!

'Walter — Gordon — wants — me — to — marry—him.'

She had never written a sentence so fast in her life before. The stump of a pencil seemed to leap and sing, and the letters to play leap-frog over one another's shoulders.

John March looked at her as if through the words. It was for them, for these very seven words, that Cleopatra lay in four pieces. But this was strangely sudden. It is not often that we question Fate, and have not to wait an answer for at least one day. Well, he had fought the battle now. He had lived his life, and sacrificed brains and heart that art

might die after all—just that two hearts might be enriched out of the thousands that hunger. Was it worth such an end? But surely any end, even this, was better than none.

'Then, marry him!' he said at last, as if he were hurling out a defiance to the gods to do their worst and have done with it, instead of making, as in truth he was, the lowliest 'Amen.'

The world had already come to an end, but now the skies fell too. It was the only answer she had never dreamed of hearing. She could not believe her own ears, any more than Walter his own eyes.

'Yes, marry him. I have said it. I have nothing more to say. Yes, I say it with my will. You shall go to him as freely as I give you. As for me, I only want a little rest for the end of my days. I have worked enough for one man. Go to him, and live all you can. So there ends a dream; and I am glad of it. Heaven's end is the best end. Go and live; and only let me have a room, with a door that has a key.'

'Father!' She did not write the cry, unless with her hands upon his arm.

'Yes,' said John March, firmly and not fiercely. And once more she knew that the one sweet moment of sympathy between them that she had known had come back again—surely at last to stay. Out of the ruins of Cleopatra a light that was to Love's as gold to silver seemed to rise.

Such light is as infectious as a panic in battle. Was it possible that they were tears that came into the eyes of the musician, from whom nothing, not only the doom of deafness, had been able to draw a tear? Cleopatra lay unheeded, not with stoical acceptance of destiny, but unthought of, as if all that had happened for the last generation had been blotted out and washed away. I know not how, but in that instant of sympathy Celia was inspired with a comprehension of the glory that came over her that afternoon like a cloud. Her incomprehensible tyrant, whoever else he was, had at least become a man, and it was not for her to ask how far the transformation was due to bodily weakness or mental despair.

'Yes,' he said again, the chronic Bourdon stop of his voice combining for once with the

veritable vox humana, 'I think it must be enough for me if life ends in putting out a natural flower or two. I don't wish I had known. That is absurd; whoever can know till afterwards? But now I know, and——"

Celia's head was gradually disappearing among the volume of white smoke, and falling upon his arm. Her first dream of conscious happiness was falling over her, and her father's words were sweeter to her than her lover's.

'Aha! I am late, Signor Stefano—Mr. March, but never mind. You are musician——'

It was worse than being interrupted by Muir—it was Prosper. Celia lifted her head with a start. Her father did not move.

'Good-day, mademoiselle. I hope you are not fatigued. Monsieur—I am Prosper; that shall say, I am not of words, Enfin, you are musician—I am Prosper. I come to a point, at the end, and arrive at the things at once at the bottoms. Is it possible that mademoiselle shall leave us alone?'

'My father is deaf, sir.'

'Deaf? Is he possible? But, never mind. Then he shall not have heard the news? But I am sorry—it is not easy to speak to a deaf man. Never mind. If mademoiselle permits——'

He took out his gold pencil-case and wrote quickly, while John March sat and smoked as unheedingly as if there were no Prosper in the world. He had yielded so thoroughly as to have given up resenting intrusion. However, it would not last for much longer now.

At last Prosper finished writing, folded up the leaf, and handed it to the deaf musician. John March read it—first mechanically; then frowningly; then he faced Prosper with more than all his old fierceness—

'And you dare propose this to me? To help you cheat the public by a forgery? Not for ten thousand pounds—not for—— Do you know who I am?'

Prosper, as if in a fit of absence, took up the mantilla from the back of its chair, and smiled—queerly. Then he looked straight and hard at Celia's eyes. He wrote:

'Mr.—Andrew—Gordon. I—forget—not—laces—monsieur.'

'Nor shall you handle them, if you please. So you want a work by Andrew Gordon? Then you must go elsewhere. Andrew Gordon is dead. He wrote Comus, and—died.'

'Ha! He is dead? But, never mind. It is the same thing. But he shall leave something. Pardon, monsieur, that I forgot you do not hear. I—shall—give—your—term—for—what—you—will—if—it—shall—have—the—name.'

Celia knew nothing of what was written; she only knew the spoken words. And, hanging on her father's eyes as he read, she followed them till, as if by a caprice of chance, they fell on a scattered heap of paper on the floor. She did not recognise in it the treasured score. But the musician knew what his own hands had made and torn. Cleopatra—and her time had come—at last, had come!

Prosper, too, followed his eyes. He was a stout man, but he managed to stoop and gather up the ruins, which he politely gave back to their maker. It was the sound of the trumpet to the war-horse—the very touch of

fire. He yield to fate, to a moment's desperate weakness, when the hour had come for the crowning of an artist's life-time! John March, the beaten and baffled man, who but a minute ago was tamely looking for a little spring-flower to plant over the grave of the dead art that at least something might grow there, rose up and said:

'I understand! They want something from the composer of Comus—the fools! They come out to find trash; they shall find—— Yes; you shall have what you ask for; and on my terms. I will take no money. I will not sell my life—it has cost me dear. Here is the work—Cleopatra. It is yours. It may not be too late for art—even now. But on one condition. It must be performed as I will; and only as I will.' For a moment he paused—the vision of himself ruling with his own bâton, like a sea-god, his own flood of sound was not to be. 'There is only one woman who can sing Cleopatra in all the world. She must sing it, or the four pieces shall be torn into four hundred. I give no reasons; it is my will.'

Prosper threw him a slip of paper on which was written but one word.

'No—never! She is as dead as—as Andrew Gordon has been. My one singer is here.'

'Father!' cried out Celia, aghast. She did not yet comprehend; but she felt that the summer had gone out, and the old winter come back with tenfold strength and chillness.

'Mademoiselle?' asked Prosper.

'I will trust it to no other hands. Take Cleopatra on those terms, or leave it, as you will.'

'Father!' this time whispered Celia, forgetting that he could not hear. It may be that, if he could, he would not have said, with a sternness that made the girl shudder and freeze back into the old Deepweald days:

'Celia, I did not bring you up to dream. You must forget your dreams. I must forget mine. We are the servants of art, you and I —of art alone. Think of it; at last, the Cleopatra, the score! Celia,' he went on, with a voice almost of appeal, 'you must not fail me! I have given my whole life for this! I have kept you pure! I have built every

thought and hope on your faithfulness and on your glory! I have done my part—my all; it is now for you to do yours!'

Celia turned pale, and felt as if her heart was dying. Clari might have known what to say; but how could Celia, being but Celia, at this crowning moment, and for her own happiness, take her father's whole life into her hands and throw it away?

'He—wants—me,' traced the pencil-stump, as if of its own accord.

'Art wants you!' answered Andrew Gordon.

BOOK IV

CHAPTER I.

A DELPHIC ORACLE.

THE Straits of Dover can scarcely be regarded as especially strange waters; but few are they in whom familiarity breeds contempt for them. On a certain last Monday in Lent, in particular, and after sundown—to be more particular still—few who had to do with them but were as shy of them as of strangers, and none parted with them but as from bitter enemies. Neither steward nor stewardess had a sinecure that evening. A strong wind had been blowing up the Channel for a week, and had left the waves to settle as they best could with one another—like fellow-citizens,

who fly to civil war as the only means of conquering somebody when a foreign enemy has swept over them. The hearts of the passengers on board the Dover packet were now left somewhere with the moon when the vessel sank, and now far under water when she swung up to the moon, and—in short, everyone had a worse time than anybody but a stewardess cares to dwell upon: as bad as the extraction of a second tooth, and worse than the rejection of a first offer.

But it was over at last. The packet lay along the pier, too late to afford a spectacle for those disciples of Lucretius who enjoy nothing so much as to stand in all the self-satisfaction of a secure breakfast, and to compare their own placid complexions with the green cheeks and yellow eyes that file before them. England grew dear, indeed. Even the next-door neighbours, and therefore the natural enemies of that nation—perfide, bourgeoise, all else that is despicable, excepting poor—felt a sense of serene relief on seeing at last those white cliffs which even in the wildest moonlight look the very type of terra firma, and the castle, which has prob-

ably seen more of cosmopolitan humanity than any other building in the world. No; there is no country so dear as England—excepting France when, on an equally bad night, we cross the same strait the other way.

'Ilma!' moaned a voice from out of a bundle of furs that seemed to have been thrown down upon deck haphazard.

'Giulia,' answered a wail from another heap of wraps hard by.

'I am dying.'

'I am dead, Giulia.'

'Where is Thérèse?'

The wail did not answer.

'Ilma, per l'amor di Dio—go and bring me Thérèse.'

'I dare say she is seeing after the things.'

'And leaving me to die. Oh, but I suffer! And you lie dozing there. But it is all for one's self in this world.'

'Ah!—in the world. But I'm out of it, Giulia.'

'Then you are not selfish any more. Per carità, bring me Thérèse.'

'Yes, Giulia.'

The disembodied spirit made an effort and rose.

'Now that you are up, Ilma, please look for my salts, and my handkerchief, and my fan. They must be very near me, I'm sure, but I dare not open my eyes. Where are you?'

'Here, Giulia. And—and—I never will be here any more.'

Of course, she who asked for help needed it the less, and she who tried to give it needed it the more. But that was the way of the world about that period. Giulia still lay passively among the furs, and talked, and ordered, while Ilma crept, ghost-like and woe-begone, across the deck, and did her best to pick up a vinaigrette that lay within three inches of Giulia's hand. But in her prostration, and in the dark, she fell forward, and in trying selfishly to save herself dropped the vinaigrette and broke it in pieces.

Giulia, who had been too prostrate even to reach out a finger or raise an eyelid, started up from among her furs lioness-fashion.

'Asino! stupidaccio! If there is one thing I care for on earth it is that vinaigrette. It

has been over the Atlantic, yes, and the Lago Maggiore; and has never been broken before. It is a bad omen—it is a warning. I had sooner you had broken your leg, or anything. It only happened to me twice before. Once I broke a fan, just before an engagement at Brussels, and the theatre was burned before I had appeared ten times; and once I broke a plate, and then a new dress was spoiled by the gravy. And this is now three times—it is the third warning. I will not land. I will go back again.'

Ilma heaved as deep a sigh as she dared. 'To-night, Giulia?'

'So soon as the ship goes back again. Thérèse! Thérèse!'

'Perhaps she is at the custom-house.'

'Then go and ask for me when this ship goes back. I will not land in England, no, not for an hour.'

'And break your engagement?'

'Corpo di Bacco—si! What is an engagement to me? I have broken twenty—but never that vinaigrette before.'

'But what shall you say to the impresario?'

'I shall say that I do what I please. We will go back again—now.'

'Giulia—I cannot go back again. I should die of agony. Oh, Giulia, for the love of heaven, let us sleep to-night on land!'

'It is true I must have some soup—but no. I will not be mad. Thérèsa shall bring me some bouillon, and I will take it here.'

It was certainly hard, after having escaped at last from those ills of the sea which are harder to bear than its dangers into the immediate prospect of rest and comfort, to be ordered to resign the dream, and to set her face seaward again. Ilma looked desperately at the sky and the sea, and yearningly at the shore, where the lights seemed blinking a welcome. But it was clear enough that Giulia was one of those whose caprices are destinies to themselves and laws to others.

'And what is to become of me?'

'Of you? Oh, you will be well again when you have eaten some bouillon. If I can go back to Calais, you can—nobody suffers like me.'

'I cannot, Giulia. I will leave the ship, and sleep on the pier. I would rather get

my death of cold, than——oh, it is horrible.'

'You are a coward, Ilma—a child.'

'I don't know that it's more like a child,' said Ilma sullenly, 'to be afraid of the sea, where one might be drowned to death any minute, or burned, or shaken inside out, than to be frightened because one breaks a smelling-bottle. I don't see how staying isn't braver than running away. And I thought, Giulia——'

'You would think nothing of such things, if you knew what I know. And, in short, I intend to go back again.'

'All the others are on land, and Thérèse will have got the things to the hotel,' said Ilma—not having learned that the surest way to turn a caprice into a resolve is to tell a woman like Giulia that her whim is eccentric, or against reason.

'Let them, and let her. The others may go on, and Thérèse must have the things brought back again.'

'I—you will die of——'

'Very well. I will die. But I will not land.'

Ilma looked appealingly to earth and heaven—everywhere, save to the pitiless sea—and clasped and wrung her hands in despair. They were the last passengers left on board, and she doubted not but that Giulia would remain, in spite of anything that could be said or done.

'I don't think they will let you stay.'

'No? Then I shall stay without letting. If they asked me to stay, perhaps I should go. Who knows?'

'I wish the captain would fall in love with you.'

'He shall, if I can stay no other way—yes, sallow and thin as I am. But here I am, and here I stay. Go to the custom-house and find Thérèse. Tell her that I return by this or by the next packet, and find a porter to bring back the luggage to the pier. I shall speak to the captain, and if I may remain on board, well; if not, I will lie down among the luggage. The pier is not the shore, after all. And then go to the hotel and order them to send me some bouillon, and some champagne, and a pillow, and some bread. Here is my purse, if they want to be paid. Yes; I will

wait upon the pier after all. It is not the shore—and I shall be more comfortable than here.'

Ilma, too ill for anything but obedience, crept off, in all the gloom of martyrdom without any of its consolations, to sacrifice herself against her will to another woman's whim. Clari wrapped her furs round her, and sat down on a stone bench to revel in her self-inflicted martyrdom—all the more enjoyable because it was absolutely without reason. Since she had left Hinchford, all the world that cared in the least to gossip about her—and it was to the full as large as any other special world—knew that her capricious eccentricities had increased, were increasing, and only ought not to be diminished because, in that case, the world would have had less to talk about than ever. As it was, people were now beginning to talk less about the magnificent voice than about the oddities of Mademoiselle Clari. She seemed to take a perverse delight in doing anything that would make somebody stare, if it were only a crossing-sweeper by giving him a piece of twenty francs instead of one of two sous. In

great things or small, it seemed to be all one to her. She would make engagements as if for the express purpose of breaking them at the last hour, or order herself to be awoke in the afternoon that she might rise at some unearthly hour in the early morning. She would buy some work of art at an extravagant price, and leave it behind her at a railway station on the ground of its being inconvenient to carry. She had been hissed at Naples for some shadowy musical offence, too subtle for non-Italian ears to grasp, and narrowly escaped imprisonment for hurling at her audience the name of 'canaglia' from the stage. She sent the unfortunate Thérèse nearly mad with her whims about dress, and would have sent her quite mad, but that the femme de chambre found such caprices not unprofitable. She went into rages over crumpled rose-leaves, and yet, at other times, would revel in discomfort and hardship—so long as it was perfectly avoidable. She would have quarrelled with Providence for not making it rain roast ortolans in Kamschatka, and yet, in Paris, would take it into her head to dress like a quakeress and live

like an anchorite—for, perhaps, a whole half day at a time. That the breaking of a smelling-bottle should prove cause enough for her to turn back from England a week before the season began, was in nowise strange for her. The only strange thing about it was that she should have had so good a reason for her whim. Mostly, she was best satisfied with having no reason at all. Reason is so painfully and vulgarly reasonable.

She had intended, or rather planned, that she, and her maid Thérèse, and Mademoiselle Ilma Krasinska—a young Polish soprano who had made a lamentable fiasco in Italy—should spend a comfortable night at Dover and, as comfortably as might be, travel to London the following afternoon. She avoided the night express because that was a quicker, cheaper, and more usual mode of proceeding. She carried Mademoiselle Krasinska with her because the Polish soprano was both a social and a musical failure—at any rate she had no other reason, unless it were the innate propensity of prime donne to patronise and make much of those who can never hope to rival

them. Cheap generosity is beyond all question the greatest luxury in the world; and Mademoiselle Krasinska had, for some weeks past, proved that the star's condescension had not been sown upon ungrateful soil. So lively was her sense of favours to come, that nothing would part her from her patroness, whose whims she obeyed as divine laws. And therefore, and for all these reasons and unreasons, Mademoiselle Clari was sitting out of doors alone in the moonlight, deliberately feeling as ill as she could, delightfully self-conscious of being homeless and friendless, deserted alike by the maid who had gone to look after the luggage and the protégée whom she had herself despatched to see after the bouillon, and thinking over the broken vinaigrette in tragic despair. People who are bent on being miserable need not be so ingenious as Clari to invent miseries when they obstinately refuse to come by nature.

But there was more in the vinaigrette than common sal ammoniac, after all.

Though nobody ever said it, though not even her looking-glass ever hinted it, there was no doubt about it—the youth of Made-

moiselle Clari was past and gone. She had worn well, had lasted perhaps even better than she had fairly worn; but not even the stars of heaven have a voice for ever in the music of the spheres. There are suns now in the skies that have not shone there always, and even the sun whom we know the best is supposed to be dying and growing cold while he gives light and heat to more than a hundred worlds. A thousand years or so are not much to him; but a great singer is a patriarch only in the eyes of a butterfly. She comes nowhence, and she goes nowhither. And it was now the last generation of opera-goers who had made Clari a queen of song. Already there were those who said to their nephews and nieces: 'Ah, but you should have heard her fifteen years ago—when she was in her prime!'

When she was—that is the root of the whole matter. There are those living who have seen a great queen, whom kings and queens of smaller nations have honoured, hissed by a gallery of gods at half-a-crown a head who could only hear the tuneless voice, and missed altogether the pathos which lay

in it because it was out of tune and tried to sing. They saw the heavy, awkward Lucrezia pulled by main force from her knees by a Gennaro who might have been, not her son, but her grandson; and they did not say, 'It is time to send her off—but let the last time be with flowers.' Some there were who only saw and heard the past, but these were few—and how could the rest care for what their fathers and mothers have heard? And so the ex-queen departed from among us in hisses and laughter, and there was a sorry end of her—before she died. Clari was not yet in sight of this pass; but her inmost heart knew that there were new stars with voices not equal to what hers once had been, but at least as pleasant to the new ears of new men as hers was now. When men mortgage their souls, according to the legends, a time is always specified for foreclosure. It had not been specified when Noëmi Baruc sold herself on the Corso; but that was because time is of the essence of such a contract as hers had been. Youth was leaving her, beauty was following, voice was hardening; and how was Clari, of all women, to bear the doom of

a dethroned queen? She might indeed retire with her glory still upon her. So people say—but only people who do not know. Those who know need not be told why; those who say it could not be made to understand. A retired soprano is as much a contradiction in terms as a retired statesman. And how was she to make a bed of laurels for herself on Lago Maggiore when she had not even the remembrance of love to make up for being absolutely alone? She had not so much as a niece to wait for her shoes.

No wonder that she put up with a protégée; no wonder that, after her fashion, she tried to impress her personality upon the world. It might not have been the best or wisest way, but it was hers. She could alternately spoil and trample upon Mademoiselle Krasinska according to her mood, and she could assert herself to the end, and so long as a shred or patch of voice was left her. Even when the world would no longer listen it could be made to stare. She could take at least the world's eyes—with which, for the most part, men hear and listen—and concentrate them upon the most singular of prime

donne. Nothing of all this was in her mind. But it was somewhere, and the spirit, or demon, of wasted womanhood drove her on from shore to shore, and from whim to whim.

Of late, things had not been going quite as she would have had them. There was that 'canaglia' episode, in which her presence of mind had only saved her from a musical fiasco by turning it into a triumph of notoriety. A new woman from New York was going to do wonderful things—according to the New York papers. There had been a cabal against her in Berlin. She had conquered, but she might not conquer a second time. Her caprices had cost her more money than would have bought twenty villas on Lake Como. It was becoming as needful to sing for money as for glory. And so it was with a sort of vague foreboding that she set her face towards the London season—even towards that faithful city which will bear with ruins till they absolutely tumble down, and will pay not for what it enjoys so much as for what it is told, on the best authority, other people used to enjoy. She did not go with a light heart to victory.

And so, when, all ill from the sea, wet, and utterly out of temper, the vinaigrette fell, it was no common omen to her Ghetto-trained mind. England, last year, had been full of strange experience for her—what was the England of this year to prove? She was not alone in feeling that prescience of fatality which says, Fly. And it is not in the Ghetto or on the stage that one learns to take a sensible view of such things. It was a warning, and she was warned.

Back came Ilma, followed by Thérèse and the luggage.

'There is no boat till to-morrow morning,' said Mademoiselle Krasinska.

'Then I shall stay here till to-morrow morning. And the bouillon?'

'It will come.'

'Ah, and so will the rain, mon Dieu!' said Thérèse, looking up to the sky. 'I feel a drop on my nose.'

'Ah!' sighed Clari, not without satisfaction in thinking how uncomfortable everybody was going to be. She was craving for sympathy, and this was the readiest road she could find.

'Prosper will say you dared not come to London,' said Ilma, fixing her eyes on one particular star.

'Prosper!' cried Clari, starting up and flushing.

'Yes, Giulia; that is what he will say.'

'Prosper! That I do not dare! Corpo d'un Cane! He thinks I cannot do without him! That he is my voice—he, the humbug, the impostor, the charlatan! Ah, but he shall see. Thérèse!'

'Madame?'

'Have the luggage back to the hotel. I go to London by the first train.'

'Madame!'

'Yes; I dare. And he shall see. I will sing him into little pieces. Ilma, give me my vinaigrette, if you please, and your arm. I go to the hotel.'

'The vinaigrette? But you can take mine.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Clari again, in another tone. 'I remember. Per Bacco! what is to be done?'

'Giulia, how can you think so much of a bit of broken glass, when——'

'Ilma—it is not for nothing that I have broken something for the third time, with Prosper for my enemy. I felt it all without the breaking. There are women in the—in Rome who would know. But Prosper shall not say I do not dare. But no——'

She stopped suddenly; one foot seemed to advance, the other to draw her back, against, or rather without, her will. Ilma looked at Thérèse in despair, which was reflected to the full.

'Ah, bestia that I am!' said Clari. 'As if to break a glass were not the happiest omen in the world! It should be a wine-glass; but the vinaigrette was glass, and why should the shape matter? It was a plate and a fan that I broke before. Dio mercè!'

'Then—we go on to London?'

'For what else are we come?' Does one come to England to go to Moscow? As for Prosper, he shall see!'

CHAPTER II.

BLASÉE.

People like Lady Quorne, who studied the advertised programmes of the coming operatic campaign with the same unconquerable faith and hope which others keep for queen's speeches, and with the same obstinate determination to find something in them, prophesied a brilliant season. The chapter of operatic history, of which these are the secret mémoirs pour servir, is already half forgotten—but it once belonged to the future, as much as the half-forgotten season of yester-year.

And it was to be exceptionally brilliant not because of its printed promises, magnificent as they were—that went without saying

—but because those who assumed to be behind the scenes knew on the best authority, and as an unquestionable fact, that there was to be a battle. The amateurs of harmony enjoy nothing so much as the prospect of a good quarrel in which gold will be shed like water; and the most persistent applause comes, not from admiration, but from an eager desire to prove, by the logic of noise, that all who admire somebody else are fools. It was on the eve of such a storm that Mademoiselle Clari arrived, once more, in London.

She herself, though conscious of a dead weight of cloud overhanging her future, knew infinitely less of what was in store for her than anybody. The most remarkable feature in all revolutions is that everybody always knows what is coming except the person most immediately concerned—namely, the king; or, in this case, the queen. But then Clari notoriously never knew, or cared to know, what was going on even in the next room. All the curiosity about her had always been on one side, and that not on her own. She knew that Prosper was her

enemy, and that compelled her, or at any rate made her suppose herself compelled, to sweep him away into nothingness, if he actively tried to harm her, with one fan-sweep; for even such midges as managers might mean mischief in these coming days of cloud. But for the complex ins and outs of musical politics the great prima donna had an indifference too complete even to be contemptuous, just as a great statesman has for the little springs and wheels of the political engine. If they go smoothly, all the better for him; if they hitch and stick, so much the worse—for the wheels. He cannot waste time in greasing and grinding, and learning the names of things which he feels himself strong enough, in case of need, to break and throw away. In short, there was perhaps never a woman who knew so little of her profession as Clari. There had been a sort of magnanimity even about what she regarded as the practice of conscious imposture. That a certain amount of dirty work had to be done in her interest she knew, but she never allowed it to soil her own fingers. She had never slandered a dangerous rival, had never

bought a newspaper puff, or a claque, or even one of the bouquets which are always so magically ready to be thrown with practised aim precisely at the right time. Of course all these things had to be bought by somebody, and while Prosper was faithful, she never found herself a bouquet the poorer for want of knowing how they came. And even since he had been faithless she found no less warmth in the tone of the musical journals—for the simple reason that she never read them.

It was by a far more subtle instinct that she had come of late to feel her power upon the wane than by the gross experience from which Prosper had saved her. And she was right in the main; though a lessening command over her voice, and an increasing furrow between the eyebrows, might not be an immediate cause of dethronement, it was the cause most obvious to herself, and must in time become so to all the world. Only it was therefore, and just at this hour, that she needed the arts which are to fame in danger what rouge is to a fading complexion. She missed nothing yet but self-confidence; but

Prosper's desertion had been uncomfortably like the conduct of the rats when a ship is growing unseaworthy. She did not fear him, but even a manager will show which way the wind blows. And so, like a queen who thinks to conquer a nation in revolt by stepping on to the balcony and smiling upon a few noisy nobodies in the square below, she came to London, heedless of what was brewing. The despised little wheels will catch and rend even their master at times, after all, and great and strong as he may be.

Her bouillon had developed into a very satisfactory meal; and when that was eaten she was better. That mention of Prosper, whether designed, instinctive, or accidental, had given her an immediate purpose—that is to say, something to live for, for a little while. To conquer Prosper was not much wherewith to fill a hungry heart and an empty life; but it was better than nothing while it lasted—better, at all events, than an aimless chaos of whims. Both Ilma and Thérèse felt that morally, as well as bodily, they were off the sea. In the railway-carriage Clari had said:

'Ilma, you do look ill! There—I will

make you a pillow with my cloak, and you shall sleep a little. No? Yes, but you shall; and if you do not I will throw my cloak from the window.'

Ilma closed her eyes obediently, and stopped the stare which had made Clari think she was going to be disobeyed. Ilma was young yet—perhaps in time she, too, would learn not to stare at an occasional longing to care for somebody besides herself in the heart of a woman who begins to feel herself being left stranded with no one but herself to care for. Clari, satisfied with ostensible which presently grew into real obedience, drew up both windows of the carriage, lay back in a corner, and looked at the girl whom she had wrapped up in her furs. There was every reason why Clari should have made a protégée of Ilma, exactly because there was every reason why nobody else in the world would have done so. The Polish fiasco was of that perverse sort of prettiness which nobody ever admires, because it is made to express only one set emotion, and that disagreeable. Her eyes were large, her nose was straight, her complexion clear, and her mouth small, and all were united in a settled look

of sullen conceit ; of sullenness, that is to say, so satisfied with itself as to be incapable of supposing any other frame of mind to be possible. She gave the impression of always being engaged in a fencing-match, and always on guard —except when she gave some little unexpected thrust which stung, and made people feel that there was something more in her than appeared. To Clari she was a slave—and queens of Clari's type like having a slave or two on whom to vent their more trifling humours. But to like having a slave is not to like the slave ; so that would not account for Clari's fancy for Ilma. Perhaps, when healthy instinct is balked, it is bound to run into eccentric and morbid grooves. Caprice apart, one can make a greater business of liking the unamiable than of liking those who make us like them, whether we will or no. Ilma had no apparent merits, no friends, and no likelihood of making any. Of all people in the world she seemed to need love most—of all people under heaven Clari most needed the sorriest chance of loving, and of being all to somebody if nobody could be anything to her. If this be not the reason, I know not what is—it is at least

better than any that Clari had for most of her behaviour. And then, if a certain child had lived, she too would be just as old as Ilma. And then—Ilma could no more be Clari's rival than the moon can rival the sun. If the last was no cause for liking, it was becoming less and less a cause for disliking, every day.

The train was on the very point of starting when the door was opened quickly and there entered, together with the salt English air which the prima donna had been so careful to exclude, a man who had been too nearly letting the train go without him to take heed of his fellow-passengers till the engine had whistled and started. The furrow between Clari's eyebrows grew yet deeper; she had intended to travel alone with her own thoughts as far as London. Ilma had at least the one charm of never intruding. But in a moment the frown relaxed; she put a few touches more languor into her half-reclining posture, and smiled graciously.

'You may smoke if you please, Monsieur Gordon.'

'What—Mademoiselle Clari! Can we have been fellow-passengers from Calais, and not met till now?'

'I think people always meet afterwards. We were below, Mademoiselle Krasinska and I, till the last half-hour. It was a terrible voyage, but it is over now. Oh, of all things I hate the sea. It is ugly, and cold, and when it is calm it is dull; but last night it was a monster.'

'I wish I had known you were on board. But—Mademoiselle Krasinska? Can it be the Mademoiselle Krasinska I used to know in Lindenheim?'

'Lindenheim?' Now, no German, or English, or French, or Russian, or American musician would believe it, but Clari had never heard of the musical metropolis; or, if she had, it was only as one hears by chance the name of some obscure village which one forgets as soon as it is heard. 'I dare say. People always have met before. But you must let her sleep now. It is good for people to sleep all they can, while they are young; they will have plenty of time for waking after, and it gets rid of some life a little. Are you sleepy?'

'Not the least.'

'Nor am I. You shall smoke if you like,

and I will talk, as it suits me. You have not finished my picture—no? I am sorry; I should like to look always as in last summer, among the cucumbers of my Lord Quorne. We were good friends then. So you know Ilma? Well, it is a poor little world, and always the same. The same things to eat and to drink and to sing, the same things to do, the same places, the same people—every day, every day, every day. One changes one's clothes, Dieu merci! If not for that, one would change nothing. Yes; and at the end one changes them for a shroud—ah, but that will be worst of all. Lying still in a box, and every minute the same—it would make one mad of ennui. You have been en voyage?'

Omen the second. The name of Death had slipped out of her lips without cause; and everybody who has even a scrap of ignorance will know what that means. It was as bad as Bath-kol, of which Noëmi Baruc had heard in the Ghetto; the mystical relation of all things to all other things, which turns the most casual words of a passer-by into prophecies—for those who keep their ears wide open. Butterflies are not given to speak of

death, and Clari least of all butterflies. She cut her audible thought in two by a commonplace question, put as suddenly and defiantly as if she could not wait a moment for its answer.

'Yes,' said Walter Gordon. 'I think it is going to rain.'

'Will you hand me my fan? Thank you. To rain? No; there is not a cloud. It is not like when we met in the auberge. No; and you are not the same.'

'I? Why?'

'Because you say it is going to rain. You used always to say, it is going to be fine—last year. Yes; even when the dog and the cat fell down.'

'But you are the same, mademoiselle—and that is the great thing.'

'Yes,' she said, raising her shoulders carelessly. 'I am the same still—for a little. I eat, and drink, and sing. I rise and dress, and I undress and I lie down. It is delightful to be a great artist, monsieur. It is not being like the others. Ah, if I had been born a man!'

'Be thankful, as the world is, that you were born a woman.'

'Thankful? I am thankful for nothing. I care for nothing. I want to go to sleep, like Ilma. Ah, how the young would sleep, if they only knew! We should not see much of them.'

'You remind me of the way we used to talk at Lindenheim—where we were all eighteen and all as old as the hills.'

'I am a year older than a year ago—and you——'

'Ten years older?'

'No; twenty. You have lived, my friend, since a year; and "la Vie, c'est la Souffrance," as poor Alphonse de Cauchemar used to say. He used to read me all his own verses till he died—so he ought to know. They were all written to Cynthia; I do not know who she was, but Victor Perrier said her real name was Absinthia, made short for rhyme. Did you ever meet Alphonse de Cauchemar? Ah, he was a great poet! He once wrote a poem that took him three weeks to read. He broke his heart all to pieces, and he sold the bits to keep him in gloves and cigars. Poor Alphonse—he was bien ganté to the end.'

Since she was in a mood to be sentimental,

no doubt poor Alphonse de Cauchemar was as good a peg for sentiment as any other. She sighed, fanned herself—it being a cool morning—and lapsed into reverie. Walter opened his newspaper, while Ilma still slept peacefully.

The train meanwhile rolled smoothly on. But suddenly Walter made a quick exclamation over some startling piece of news. Clari looked, and saw that he was reading hurriedly and intently.

'What is it, mon ami? Ah, it is good to be a man; one can care for the newspapers.'

'The Cleopatra—it is announced; it is going to appear.'

'The Cleopatra.'

'Yes.'

'A new opera? I have not heard. But, after all, what does it matter? It shall not give me anything new to learn.'

'You are going to sing in London—and you have not heard of the Cleopatra?'

'Ah, it interests people, then?'

She used her fan in the way which Hinchford experience ought to have told him, was a symptom of possible heat on the part of

the woman who cared for nothing. She was not used to hear that people were going to be interested in anything or anybody but Mademoiselle Clari. It was a peculiar wave of the fan, which might signify either the cooling of unwished-for warmth, or the blowing of a chance spark into a flame.

'It interests me,' said Walter.

'Somebody is going to sing in it,' said Clari, sharply. 'Who?' Which meant, however it may be with other people, you, at least, ought not to interest yourself in anybody but Mademoiselle Clari.

'Oh, some——Good heavens!'

'Well?'

He folded up the paper and looked abstractedly at the hedges and trees as they whirled by. Clari began to fan the spark rapidly.

'Well?' she asked again, icily.

Walter faced her slowly.

'Miss Celia March is going to be the Cleopatra.'

'Oh, an Anglaise!' said Clari, snapping her fan together, raising her shoulders, and curling her lip with what would have been

contempt, had contempt been worth while. 'They do not count—the Anglaises; not in your country. I do not see why a young man should be ashamed to care about a pretty girl. I hope she will be a very nice Cleopatra—yes, very nice indeed!' she added, throwing open the fan again.

'You don't remember her?'

'Remember her? No. How can I remember what I have never seen?'

'You heard her at Hinchford—last year. She came with Gaveston, and sang to you and Lady Quorne.'

'Ah! That girl? She is gone on the stage?'

'So it seems,' said Walter, gloomily.

'And you object? Corpo d'un——! You have a great care for this Miss Cynthia, Miss Celia, whatever she is called, monsieur. You said, she is going to be Cleopatra, as if you would say, she goes to the guillotine.'

'Care? I am simply at my wits' end!'

'I believe it—per Bacco! I will lend you mine, if you will. What! is it strange for a girl to go on the stage? It is only strange if she succeeds. And she will fail! Yes;

I remember her very well. Why are you at your wits' end?'

'I will tell you. You have heard me speak of my uncle, Andrew Gordon? He composed an opera called Comus; it was revived last year, last autumn, and made a furore, and no wonder. You were not in England, or you would have known. One evening I met Prosper at Lady Quorne's: he told me of his quarrel with you, and then he talked to me about the chance of my uncle's having left something behind him. There was nothing — absolutely nothing; but I joked about reviving him, or inventing a discovery, or something of that kind. The next day—if I was not mad—I saw with my own eyes the score of this Cleopatra, with my uncle's name, Andrew Gordon, signed at the end.'

'You—saw—Andrew—Gordon's—Cleopatra?——With—your—eyes?'

There was a clear pause between each word. Noëmi Baruc felt the coming shadow of the third omen, and could hardly breathe.

'I need not tell you all the details. A great deal happened, that concerns me only.

The end of it is, that I have been abroad—in Italy. I made it my business to look for every trace of my uncle. Short of his proved death, I found all that need be known. He disappeared so completely that he could only have died. And now——'

Clari laid back her head, closed her eyes, moved her fan slowly, and sang, sotto voce, as if thinking of nothing,

'Portatemi il diadema—col mio sangue
Desij divini sorgono dal cuor;
Aria divengo e fuoco: appena langue
Sul labbro un bacio di terrestr' amor.
Antonio mi chiama——'

'Mademoiselle—if I am not indeed gone mad—you are singing the last scena in the Cleopatra; I saw it in the score! In Heaven's name, what does this mean?'

'It means,' said Clari, half opening her eyes—'it means that Miss Cynthia, Miss Celia, will sing in the Cleopatra of Signor Andrew Gordon. Yes; of Andrew Gordon. And it means,' she went on, with a note of triumph in her tone, 'that she will fail. There is no living woman can sing that music. No; not one!'

So she spoke, and so she felt; but Noëmi Baruc had but one intense thought that flooded heart and brain.

'That girl whom Signor Walter loves is to be made to sing by Prosper, whom I come to crush, in the work of the man who slew my life and my child. Tooth for tooth, eye for eye. Thank God, that, dead though he is, he lives in his work, that I may slay his soul!'

'But—but the air,' said Walter; 'you know the Cleopatra? When—how?'

'How? I have learned that scena in Italy—perhaps in Milan, perhaps in Rome; who knows? It came back to me when you spoke of Cleopatra. Ah, and many things! But I am tired. I will sleep till we arrive.'

'One moment—one! You do not know all that this means to me. You knew Andrew Gordon. Why have you never said so, when you knew——'

'Why should I speak of him? Yes; I have seen him—in Rome. A woman will not speak too much of times long ago. It is true. I was a child.'

'Would you—would you know him if you saw him again?'

Clari paused. She was desiring vengeance, but as yet was planning none. She only felt, and the feeling was as yet but an outcome of the desire, that, in some unseen manner, her enemy was surely delivered into her hands. For that matter, all her enemies—for their three heads grew from the same stalk, the Cleopatra, just as Domitian wished that the heads of his foes might grow, so that one sharp stroke might suffice for all. Not that such small heads as those of Celia and Prosper counted for much any longer. The possible rival must be swept away, and Prosper crushed; but the grand revenge on her arch-enemy, living or dead, would imply all. Life would have been worth living at last, if it had led her at last to one hour of full revenge. But meanwhile she only grasped a shadow. As yet she knew nothing, but that one hasty word or false step would ruin the whole vision of judgment, and bury herself in the ruins.

'No — yes,' she said sleepily. 'Who knows? Per Bacco, not I. How can I see a dead man?' She shuddered a little. Twice she had spoken of death in a single hour.

'I wish I was a man. Perhaps I should not want to sleep when I am tired; and perhaps I should not want without getting my way.'

She put up her feet on the seat before her, turned her shoulder to Walter, and lay silent and still. After all, he thought, what was it to her? He might as well deal with running water as with Clari of the thousand moods. He had come back from Italy, assured that the Cleopatra must needs be an impudent forgery, and that his Bohemian uncle had, beyond question, disappeared from the world of men. And now, beyond question, the Cleopatra was genuine, and the ex-organist of Deepweald, and Celia—— To think was impossible.

Was John March his uncle Andrew? No. He had denied Comus; and it was as natural to base a theory upon the possibility of Beethoven's denying Fidelio.

And 'no' again; for his uncle had had every reason to assert himself, and none to lie concealed. A man does not bury himself from every chance of wealth and fame, or starve in a garret when gold is waiting to be poured into his hands.

Andrew Gordon had disappeared. Cleopatra was in the hands of John March; John March was starving, and Prosper needed Cleopatra. Men of the Bohemian type occasionally disappear in Rome, as well as in London. And, when an artist dies, his effects must fall into other hands than his own. Men have been murdered for their gold before now. Why not for the gold of their brains? John March was at any rate no common man—Prosper, no common rascal. The receiver makes the thief; and Celia—— once more, to think was impossible. The trees and hedges reeled by, faster and faster, and his brain with them.

Ilma, with a long yawn, opened her eyes.

CHAPTER III.

CHI LO SA?

THE dream had indeed died out of Celia's life before it was born. It had been as if the most timid of all blossoms had dared to put its head above ground just a day before the winter came back again, in seven-fold force, to the world, after saying a farewell as delusive as a prima donna's. She knew that before the work, now changed back from a madman's vision into a stronger reality than ever, all else must shrivel up and be swept away. Celia's feelings can only be told for her, for she never had the chance to tell them to a father who was deaf, or to a lover whom she never met but by fits and starts, and who, when she did meet him, talked instead of

listening. We all know what the work had meant to her—what inexorable destiny means to life; a scythed car of the fates, bound to crush or cut down all that might come in its way. The cathedral had shadowed her earlier life, but the work had overshadowed and dwarfed even the cathedral. She did not even complain. It is usual for people to go through life without complaining of death, even though they know that death must come. Nor, as we have been told by him whose works the Reverend Reginald Gaveston introduced to Deepweald, did another fair woman complain of being sacrificed that her father might win a divine victory:

> 'Moreover it is written that my race
> Hewed Ammon, hip and thigh, from Aroer
> On Arnon unto Minneth,'

she sang, with glowing face, before she passed afar.

Something of her father's exaltation before the shadow of victory had infected Celia, even in the death-hour of her dream. It was no child of John March who could for an instant consciously question his right to demand all sacrifices for the artistic Juggernaut whose

car he drove. He and she had been devoted by birth to the idol's service; that was her faith beyond even a thought of questioning. Mrs. Swann would as soon have thought of questioning whether to keep house respectably is the whole duty of woman. Had the question come before her, she might have answered No; but the No would have had no real meaning for her, and the question could never come. No; others might be born to buy, sell, eat, drink, and marry; but John March had been born to compose Cleopatra, and Celia to sing the part of the soprano. It was her creed, held, not with the loose hold of reason, but with the absolute grasp of the faith of some Spanish nun, who never hears of a doubt, and much less feels one. So far as she thought at all, girls like Bessie Gaveston had mothers, brothers, sisters, and friends—she had never known such things. She was of the score, not of the world.

But—Walter?

There was no help for it; not even for him—not even from him. An Indian woman might not even say 'Thank you' to the misguided man who tried to save her from flames.

Like the rest, he must submit to be crushed and trampled over by the inevitable score. After all, she sighed—it was to be for the last time—it would not matter so much to him. He would still be in the world, and the world would still be round. Only she must try to keep on the opposite side. She did begin to wonder a little why the earth held so much happiness for others, and not a solitary grain out of all its profusion for her; but the answer was at hand—the score. People who were made to be happy had no score; people who had the score were not made to be happy. Perhaps the score was a higher end for human life, perhaps not; but in any case it was—the score; its existence was its reason. It was the horizon of her philosophy.

Why did he care so much for her? But why did he care about her at all? Why had he chosen her for his friend at Lindenheim, when there was Ilma, and Lotte, and fifty more, of whom not one was shy! But then that was an old question. The only possible answer to it was still almost too sweet even for a dying dream, and she sighed very deeply—it was to be really for the last time.

If he cared for her so much—and whatever he said must be true—she could not help being a little sorry for him, for gratitude alone required that she should give all he asked for to one who had done, in truth, nothing for her, but a nothing so brilliant that it looked to her better than all the somethings under the sky. But she was not taking from him all possibilities of giving life a human heart as well as a—score. Everything, every waif of thought or fancy, blew back to that inexorable, all-containing word. If acquiescence without knowledge be a merit, Celia March was a heroine; and so is the Suttee who will not be saved.

But she felt very unlike a heroine when, her father having gone out to compare coming triumph with present surroundings, and to walk off his exaltation round that neighbouring Abbey which has a right to sympathise with ambition, she picked out her father's very worst quill stump, which might be worth five guineas as a relic some day, found a sheet of straw paper, and felt very much as when she first tried to write her first letter home. Only there was no good-humoured Lotte to

help her. She was alone with the score—torn, but triumphant in its tatters.

'Dear Herr Friend.' 'Dear Herr Walter,' she began. 'Dear Friend' ran into its place; but, as she had but one possible sheet of paper, which prevented drafts and corrections, she was obliged to leave the compromise alone. And now how was she to go on? And yet go on she must, unless she intended to see Walter again on the morrow, and that must not be. 'The score is to be brought out. It feels like a dream. It is a great thing for my father. You know how he has lived for it. It seems so strange. I am proud about it; I suppose I am glad; but one thing must be. I must make up my mind never to see you again. I never ought to have seen you after I first met you in Deepweald. It is not my fault, indeed, if you are sorry. I don't know what is going to be done, but I must do my part, whatever happens. I wish I could tell you all that I want to say, but I never have any words. If you think I am ungrateful to you for your goodness, it would make me more unhappy than you would like anybody to be. I don't

want you to forget what you said to me to-day. Please let me know that there is somebody who cares for me a little. It will make things better. I shall never forget anything, and shall always know that I have the best friend, though I shall never see him. Please do not come here again. How can I say it to make you know that I mean what I say?' She wrote that sentence fast enough—for she meant it with all her strength, and Walter was just the man to be brought rather than kept away by such a letter. 'I have no paper left. Please don't come here if you care for me at all. Good-bye, dear friend.' There was no doubt about what to call him this time. 'And thank you for everything. Thank you more than I can say.

'CELIA MARCH.'

This cold apology for a letter Walter Gordon had carried with him to Rome, and then back again from Rome to London. And if ever lover was puzzled by a letter, it was he. There was no use in trying to read between the lines, however much he tried. There was no space between them for secret writing,

either literally or by metaphor. How could he, or any commonplace mortal, imagine or conceive that a girl, otherwise as sane as her fellows, would dismiss a lover, just as a matter of course, for ever, because her father was going to bring out an opera?

A lover leaps but to one conclusion in such cases. If she had cared for him enough to give him a hope—that is to say, if she did not hate him, she would have kept her No for a second meeting, and not have forbidden a second meeting in words which, as he read them, were, not too strong, but too cold, to misunderstand. Good-bye was too frozen to mean anything more or less than good-bye. And her life felt cold enough indeed when she wrote it—but that he could not know. A better letter-writer could perhaps have made him feel that the frost of life was for her, and not for him.

But why should she hate him? What had he done? Nothing, he thought, with an immediate shame at feeling that 'nothing' expressed only too accurately all that he had done. It seemed to him like bitter sarcasm that she should make gratitude the one

tangible point of her letter—and, if it had been just, gratitude is the ne plus ultra of insult to a lover. Was it really sarcasm—or did it only seem so because the cap fitted? Certainly, to suspect Celia of sarcasm was as wild as to imagine her making a pun, or of indulging in any other form of what is called humour. No; the gratitude must be as genuine as the dismissal. So she could not hate him; and there must therefore be some other reason for her letter.

Suddenly it flashed upon him—her father was a madman, and she knew it, and that accounted for all.

It accounted for his strange and solitary life in Deepweald, for Celia's morbid shyness and seclusion, for the impenetrable secrecy that surrounded him, for the strangeness of his behaviour, for his keeping his daughter from every chance of love and marriage. The score might be the cause or the result of his lunacy. Probably the cause; but, in the result, the likeliest thing in the world was that a mad musician, with the glory of Comus and of Andrew Gordon filling the atmosphere about him, should invent one illusion

the more—that he himself was the man of whom all were speaking, and that his mad work, beyond the reach of mortal voice to sing, was the chef-d'œuvre of a dead man instead of the craze of a living one. Walter had imagination enough to picture the lunatic, under some flow of midnight madness, signing his work 'Andrew Gordon,' and proclaiming to himself, 'I am he'—to forget it in some lucid interval, or to deny his dream by daylight with a madman's cunning, only to revel in it the more when alone with the moon. He had read of such things, in fiction, a hundred times. He had heard of the true story of the madman who only differed from so-called sane people in being saner than they until the conversation turned upon Waterloo; and then people, who had the mere commonplace delusion of thinking themselves wiser and better than their neighbours, found it a myth that Napoleon Bonaparte had died at St. Helena. Sane impostors have come to believe themselves honestly to be what they at first only pretended to be, or wished to be. And surely that a madman, and a musician —the alliteration counts for something—who

heard his professional atmosphere filled with Andrew Gordon, Andrew Gordon, Andrew Gordon, should come to confuse his own identity, was the simplest thing in the world —and, to Walter Gordon, the most terrible.

But there was another question still.

Supposing that it was not John March who madly called himself Andrew Gordon, but Andrew Gordon who called himself John March? Granting madness, that too would account for all. Nothing but a madman would have run away from the triumph of Comus, and have buried himself, under a feigned name, from fortune, fame, family, and friends. Had that sudden glory of a first work turned his brain, and exiled him under the consciousness of an awful doom? Did the difference between him and all the cotton-spinning Gordons consist, not in genius, but in madness, its twin-sister? In that case, concealment of his identity might have become his craze, and his true self only to be indulged in when there were no eyes to see; and his craze, by a law of lunacy—for anarchy has its laws—would inevitably be strongest when brought in contact with those of his own name and kin.

Yes; Celia was in the power of a madman, and his blood was in her own veins. And John March knew it, and Celia knew it too.

Only one thing was left for him or for any man to do. Whatever might be the truth, whatever might happen, he must be master of the situation, and not allow himself to be tangled, like a blundering fly, in a web spun by a mad spider. It was strange enough that a professed lotus-eater should find his whole life thrown into chaos by webs of other men's spinning, and feel his whole fate depend upon the questions, whether a madman was or was not his uncle, and whether a girl loved him. But even to professed lotus-eaters such complications do happen sometimes. And, when they do, the lotus-eater is apt to suffer more than common men, who are content to live among common things, and to take their share of daily burdens.

First of all he wrote two letters.

'Dearest Celia,' began the first. 'I only know one thing on earth—that I meant all I said to you yesterday, and far more, with all my heart and soul. Beyond that I know nothing, except that I deserve nothing. Of

course I will not call to-morrow if it pains you; and I do know you well enough, I think, to know that what you say you mean. To-night I start for Italy. You will understand why I must not give myself a thought, before I know whether my uncle, Andrew Gordon, is dead or alive. If he lives, I hope I need not tell you that he has claims upon our family which, whether he urges them or no, my father would be the last man to disregard. If he is dead, you may trust me in all things; if I have as yet been of no service to you or yours, you may be sure that no harm shall come to you or yours through me. That, you will surely not, for one moment, imagine. Nor is there anything on earth, whatever it may be, except your will, which I will allow to prevent my having what means all life and all happiness to me. Read over the last sentence three times, and think of all that it can mean. By "nothing on earth" I mean to leave out nothing; no misfortune, any more than I should omit crime or sin. I love you with all my heart and soul. Nothing can alter that; and I wish to have you for my wife more than I wish for all other things. It

is all I wish for. Don't think that I have overlooked anything that could stand in the way. Only it is due to you, to your father, to mine, to all whom it may in any way concern, that there should be no mystery—that the truth may be known as soon as it can be found. I will not see you till either it is found, or till discovery is proved impossible. Then I will see you; and you will find me unchanged. Think, dearest Celia, of all that I have written, and either answer me as I would have you, or give me a better reason than the world contains for giving me such an answer as will kill every hope I have in the world. There is nothing you may not tell me; but I tell you beforehand, that your dislike shall be the only reason that I will accept for "No." If you write, direct "Poste Restante, Rome."

'W. G.'

'Dear Muir,' began the second, 'I am just off for Italy—suddenly, and pour cause. You know that I am a stone of the rolling order; but this is really an urgent private affair. I should like to have seen you again before setting out, but I couldn't spare the time. Of

course that's a façon de parler, as we used to say in Paris; a lie, as we used to say at Horchester; but never mind. I didn't want to see you, but I want to write to you; and so I do what I want, and don't do what I don't, as usual. When a fellow starts for foreign parts suddenly, and without preparing anything but what he can't get en route, he is sure to leave undone many things that he ought to have done. That is the major premiss; I am the minor. Now for the conclusion. Of course I want you to do something for me; and you will do it, just because you are a good fellow, and it is the fate of all good fellows to be put upon. In fact, I prefer to write my request so as to make it impossible for you to say "No."

'You know your neighbours, the Marches. You are a surgeon, and a Scotch surgeon; that is to say, a psychologist into the bargain. Find out for me if John March is a man whom you believe to be sane. I will tell you why, hereafter. Meanwhile, this is a very serious question for me, and concerns the business on which I am gone. Of course you will keep counsel. Sane or no, he has friends, and I am one of them. Of course, I don't give you

any symptoms to go by. I am still physician enough to know that you will judge best with a mind that has not been written upon.

'Another thing. I am afraid the Marches are desperately poor. I must help them to live; but though it's easy to find the money, it's difficult to find a way to give it. Once more I look to you. I had thought of paying for a course of singing lessons for you—an hour a day wouldn't take up much of your time; but from what I know of March, he would dismiss you after the first hour as a case of hopeless incapacity. I have heard your "Scots wha hae," and I can imagine your attempt at a scale. Gifts and loans are not to be thought of for a moment. So please be a connoisseur in lace, or the agent for a connoisseur —anonymous, mind, for my name mustn't appear—and give a fancy price for a certain lace veil that Miss March wore at Lady Quorne's. Everybody saw it and raved about it, so that there would be nothing wonderful if somebody should wish to buy it. There could be no difficulty there; if there is, telegraph and let me know. Give March whatever he asks, but don't let him ask less than a

hundred pounds. I enclose a cheque for it; only don't pay with the cheque, but in gold, so that my name mayn't come out in the transaction. If more is wanted, pay on account, and telegraph again. I know all the trouble will be yours; but you must admit that all the ingenuity is mine.

'Don't take me for a madman, yet awhile. You know that that reason can be none the worse, and may be all the better, for not being given. Address, by telegraph, "Poste Restante, Rome," till further orders. I mean, I need not say, till further requests, if any; for I know what trouble you are going to take, and am yours, with thanks which, though paid beforehand, are not discounted,

'W. Gordon.'

Having, as a matter of course, asked for telegrams from a man who was rich when he could spend the price of a foreign letter upon a meal, for time from one who had none to spare, and, in general, for careful attention to details from anybody but himself, he set off on that search for such possible footmarks of Andrew Gordon as a whole generation might

have failed to wash away from the shifting soil of Italy, carrying in and over his heart Celia's first, last, and only letter, and reading it till he had misread it in a hundred ways. No letter from her lay at the post-office. Nor had he found one from Muir till after many days, merely to tell him that the Marches had left Saragossa Row for an address known to Mrs. Swann, who also reported that they had gone away clear of debt, and, to her certain knowledge, were in no need of money. So that, at least, was well; and he had far too much to think of to notice that Muir's note was both curt and cold. For that matter, male correspondence is not often criticised.

Enquire as he would, of hotel keepers, of musicians, of all possible people, official and unofficial, whose age or position made knowledge on their part possible, no traces could he find, save two. One was, that at such a date, an Englishman named Gordon had arrived, with passport in due form, and had put up at such an hotel. Naturally, the hotel had changed its staff in the course of so many years. But there proved to be a fille-de-chambre there whose grandfather had been a

valet-de-place in the old times, and was still alive. And he, by a stretch of memory so vivid as to be hardly distinguishable from an effort of imagination, distinctly recalled to mind that an Englishman had, that same year, left the hotel to see the Carnival, and had never been seen again. Had he paid his bill? Ah, that the signor grandfather could not exactly remember; but he presumed no; why else should he disappear? Nor removed his luggage? No; his luggage remained at the hotel—perhaps yes, perhaps no. His name? It was an English name; but he was a little ugly man, young, and—in effect, as his excellency might know, young men, and old men too, disappeared not seldom if they stayed out after dark in Rome. What became of them? The signor grandfather only shrugged and said, Chi lo sa? Which meant, as plainly as a shrug and a tone could speak, they get stabbed in the back, and robbed, and left in the open road, or thrown in the river, and nobody knows but one man who will not speak except to his priest, and one who cannot, because he is dead, and there is an end.

And so, after all, Walter Gordon had come

back to London only to learn that the Cleopatra of Andrew Gordon was announced by Prosper, and that Celia was to appear in the title-rôle. If John March was mad, there was more method in his madness than was pleasant to find. And Clari had bewildered him still more—not by her moods, which he had ceased to regard as any more significant than the caprices of a spoiled prima donna, but by her assertion that in any case the Cleopatra was the genuine work of a man whom she had known alive after the Carnival. It all seemed an inextricable maze of deeds without motive, and consequence without cause, only accountable by the assumption that Walter Gordon himself was the only madman in the world, or else that all the world was mad except Walter Gordon. He was absolutely fighting with formless shadows; and he clung to his love for Celia as to the one pure steady lamp in a dance of phantoms. It was becoming the only real thing in the whole world.

CHAPTER IV.

A REAL PRINCESS.

One disadvantage about having to wait upon Clari was, that no servant, though with all the experience of Thérèse, could discover a law by which to tell whether she would take coffee or chocolate, or neither, on any given morning, and if either, at what hour; while, if she were asked which she would have, or kept waiting half a minute, she was put out of temper for at least five, and would, ten to one, contradict her own choice if it came. It had been reserved for Ilma alone to hit upon the happy device of having both prepared and ready at all hours—a simple plan enough, but which, more, no doubt, than many a greater thing, had made life go more smoothly

of late, and helped her largely to be indispensable to her patroness. Of course, it compelled Clari to find some grievance a little farther off when she wanted one for breakfast; but there, also, Ilma was serviceable.

It was in particularly ill humour that Clari first woke and rose after her arrival in town. But, try as she would, there was no discomfort upon which she could lay a finger. No parched pea under her spring mattress had given her an excuse for having passed a sleepless night; and, indeed, that misfortune she never had a pretence for pretending. She must, being mortal, have had a few faults, but neither indigestion nor insomnia was among them. She had a particular wish for coffee; it was there, even before she had fairly opened her eyes. Her room was comfortable, and the sun was shining; nor had last night's wind given her the least cold. Ilma was in the room waiting to serve her; and yet she was cross, and Ilma knew it while her eyes had still been closed.

The great prima donna, under these conditions, was not quite so imposing as between eight and eleven in the evening. Neither her

white flannel jacket nor the net in which her hair was bound up, helped to set her off, and her complexion was by no means improved by being left to nature. But, nevertheless, there were few, if any, of her rivals who bore these private conditions so well. The crow had scarcely touched her with his feet, and her unrouged skin was simply pale, and not leaden or sallow, as one might expect to see. Beyond question, a combination of impulsiveness with a sound liver is the grand receipt for keeping young. A woman who changes her emotions more often than she changes her gown, so that no impulse has time to turn one hair gray, will keep more fresh and alive even than a tortoise or an oyster, though she be from a country where young blood dries soon. Clari's gray hairs were very few indeed, and were lost among the gold. And then her eyes could never grow old, even if they tried.

'Ilma!'

'Yes, Giulia?'

'What did he say was the name of that woman?'

'Who said was the name of what woman, Giulia?'

'Corpo d'un——I think everybody is the stupidest in the world. One has to explain everything. One would think you had left all your wits out of your trunks; and you know, if there is one thing I hate, it is stupidity, and having to explain. How can I tell you what woman when I had to ask you for her name?'

'You mean about this Cleopatra?'

'If you like. It is all the same. I can live very well without knowing, and it is nothing to me. Only I hate to have stupid people about me, and it is the most stupid not to remember names.'

'But I do remember, dear Giulia.'

'Yes? But never mind. I do not want to know any more.'

'It is Celia March. I knew her in Lindenheim.'

'Ah, yes—Celia; the other name is too hard for me. Did she sing like that at Lindenheim?'

'Like what, Giulia?'

'In the name of Heaven, are you a fool? Like what I heard at Lady Quorne's; like ——but how should you know? What was she at Lindenheim?'

'Monsieur Gordon could tell you that best.'

'He? Bah! He hears with his eyes. I don't want to be told what he thinks of her. One does not go to a man to know what he thinks of a woman's singing, if she is not as old as the hills, nor so ugly as the devil's sister.'

'Oh, she sang like anybody else, I suppose. But she got hold of the professors, like all those demure girls. She was sharp enough; she knew what she was about very well,' said Ilma demurely.

'Tell me the name of every professor in Lindenheim,' said Clari suddenly.

Ilma was never surprised, though for Clari to take an interest in Lindenheim was as if she were to develop a sudden curiosity about the political constitution of Kamschatka.

'There were Moschel, Schweifmann, Saul, Judex——'

'Diaminé, how stupid you are! What do I care for all those German fiddlers? Was there no Englishman?'

'Among the students?'

'Do you want to make me go mad and kill you?'

'Not among the professors—Gott bewahre!' said Ilma piously. 'The English don't teach; they learn.'

'And this Miss Celia—she sang no differently from the others at Lindenheim?'

'Nobody thought anything of her—except the professors, and Gordon, and the students, who did not sing themselves, and so, of course, could not know anything. But I suppose a little goes far in England. No; she was a terrible coquette; but nobody could accuse her of singing.'

'Ilma—you were jealous of her.'

'I—jealous of her? Mon Dieu!'

'Yes—of Gordon.'

'Giulia!'

'Well—perhaps not,' said Clari, who leaped to conclusions, but never stayed there. 'But—you are sure that—that nobody named Gordon was at Lindenheim?'

'Of course there was, Giulia.'

'Ah! And——'

'Why, haven't we been talking about him? Of course, Herr Walter Gordon was at Lindenheim.'

'Thank Heaven, I'm no saint, or I should

be angry. Ilma, you are a fool. Ring for Thérèse. I am going to get up. I am going to call on Prosper.'

'Giulia? On Prosper?'

'Why not? I have known him long enough,' said Clari lazily, as if it were the most natural thing to pay a friendly visit to one's bitterest enemy.

Ever since that memorable lunch at Hinchford she had taken it into her head that Celia had learned her style from the arch-fiend in person, under his earthly name of Andrew Gordon, and from no meaner personage. And now it was plain to her, for many unconscious reasons, that this satanic instruction had taken place since Celia was at Lindenheim. Even Ilma must have been struck by that grand old style, if it had been there at all. She was excited by no special purpose—the instinct of revenge is eternally blind, and for the most part even strikes blindly. That her enemy, the great art-demon, was falling somehow into her hands was all that she knew.

Having said that she was going to get up at once, she of course lay watching the flies

for another half-hour. Then she made an elaborate toilet with the help of Thérèse, sent for a cab, and drove at once to the Parnassus, that is to say, Prosper's Theatre. The great man was busy. But he could not be denied to the yet greater lady—for such she was still, at least, before the event of the battle. She found him in his private room.

'Prosper,' she said imperiously, and with no form of salutation, 'I want the address of Andrew Gordon.'

'Of your husband, madame?'

'Of Signor Andrew Gordon. He is alive, then.'

'And you want his address, madame?'

'If you please.'

'But I do not please, madame—not at all.'

'Then since I please.'

'And, may I ask madame why?'

'Because I please. A wife may ask where to find her husband—Diaminé!'

"But a husband may not always wish to see his wife, madame. And in this case, madame, it is not only may not—it is cannot, and will not, and shall not, madame.'

'Shall not?'

'Madame mistakes. I am Prosper—I am not a slave. No woman who will devour oysters like madame shall dictate to me.'

'Pazzie! I know your oysters. It is because you think I grow old—I!—and hoarse and ugly, and am a ladder to be kicked away: and because you are ashamed to be a traitor and a coward, but are not ashamed to be thought a fool. But you are a coward, and a traitor, and a fool, yes, all, and you are—in fine, you are Prosper. Yes; you are Prosper, and I am Clari; and if I am as old as Falerni, and as ugly as Stragaccia, and as hoarse as Ranuzzini, I shall have my way—with you.'

When one has the art of abuse without loss of dignity, one also has the art of ruling very nearly as well as if one were altogether too dignified to abuse. Clari had spoken to Prosper as a washerwoman might to a pickpocket; but then a pickpocket is best met by the language best suited to him. Years of slavery to this woman's humours made his forehead grow damp at the names she had called him.

'It was the oysters. On the honour of a gentleman, it was the oysters, madame.'

'Bah! I may be ugly, and old, and hoarse, and Miss Celia may be beautiful as day, but I am not a fool. You will give me the address if you please.'

'I would give it you with pleasure, madame. But in the first place——'

'Well?'

'I must know why.'

'Ah, you think I would kill him?'

Prosper shrugged his shoulders. 'It is possible.'

'No. I do not think I shall kill him. He has not killed me. I wish to see my husband, since he is alive.'

'In the second place—I do not know his address, madame.'

'Prosper, you are a liar.'

'Madame—parole d'hon——'

'No. I shall not kill him. But if you will not say, I will kill you—parole d'honneur.'

'Gentlemen do not go out with ladies, madame.'

'And ladies do not go out with cowards. They stab them in the back, or they poison them, or—in fine they know what to do.

But no—I will not do that till the Cleopatra has failed; and then you will kill yourself, and save me the trouble, my friend. I hate trouble.'

'Have you not stayed here long enough, madame?'

'I have stood long enough, that is true. I will sit down. It is more easy to wait for twenty years in a chair. Ah, it is comfortable, this sofa. I will sit down here.'

'Ah, you are terrible. There, chez Madame Snow, Saragossa Row, Lambeth.'

'Write it down.'

She took the note, and left the Parnassus, without a good-morning. For all her chance flashes of insight it was easy enough to lie to Clari, and especially easy for Prosper to lie, to her or to any one.

She showed the note to the cabman whom the stage-manager called for the prima donna of the rival house, and drove to the terra incognita of the Row.

Muir was still Mrs. Snow's favourite lodger.

Six months, nay, six years ago, he had

both worked and fared harder, for the benefit of his father's creditors, than most men can for their own. Indeed, when a man has reached a point of working eighteen hours out of every twenty-four, it is hard to see what point there is for him to reach farther. It is true that a German professor once laid it down that no man can be called a student who works less than twenty, or owns a hat or pair of boots; but then, he was a German professor. And yet, for the last few months, Muir had turned his former self into a mere idler in comparison with what he was now. Loss of faith in their fellows makes two men in a hundred turn to faith in helping them; and he was one of the two. Having worked eighteen hours a day for the benefit of his creditors, he now, for his own, worked seven hours a day more—crowding twenty-five into the twenty-four. Happily, being a surgeon, self-help meant help for the world, so that this mad magic of arithmetic was not thrown away.

The fact is that he had woke up one morning, and found himself a fool. Nay, the next morning he had a terrible fear upon him that he was acquiring the natural result of

being a fool—being a rogue. One guinea that, in his code of morals, belonged to a Manchester house which had forgotten the bad debt of Muir senior years ago, he had spent in gloves for a strange woman, another five shillings in cab-hire for her, and another whole five pounds in hard cash; and all so much like a fool, that he had put it out of his power even to hear her say 'Thank you.' And if there was one thing he despised, it was letting a woman make either a fool or a rogue of a man. And now she had gone, and more sunlight went out of his life than he had ever guessed to be there.

And how gone? Well, after all, she was but a painter's model; and it was natural enough that, when a rich young man offered her a better home than Saragossa Row, she should take what came to her in the way of trade. It could not be very pleasant to keep a deaf father, by sitting and getting a stiff neck at the rate of a few shillings a day. Muir knew the poor too well to think much the worse of anybody, in the abstract, for yielding to such temptation; and the Thames, the great highway of suicides, was within a

stone's throw. So when Mrs. Snow told her model lodger, with much parade, that she knew where Miss March had gone—if she chose to be indiscreet—and why, he ought to have shrugged his shoulders after the fashion he had learned in Paris, and dismissed the matter from his mind with an easy 'One more.' But Celia—and Walter Gordon! It seemed to come terribly home. And when Gordon wrote to him in that hypocritical fashion from Rome, to make him a go-between, that the pride of the father of his friend's mistress might be spared, he could only put on those extra seven hours, turn misogynist and misanthrope for ever, do all the good in his power, and recover for his creditors the six pounds six shillings of which he had defrauded them in a moment of weakness, of which he fancied himself healthily ashamed. But it was strange—the more brains and hours he put into his labours, the more heart went out of them.

The record of his days was exciting enough to a hospital surgeon, and he saw more romance in a week than the wildest reader of novels dreams of in a year. But one after-

noon, while passing through the baker's shop on his way out, he saw a stranger sight than even a surgeon sees in a century—a fine lady, in the height of fashion, entering a baker's shop in Saragossa Row. She must have been formidably hungry indeed.

'No, ma'am,' Mrs. Snow was saying from behind the counter, 'I never lodged nobody of the name of Gordon. I may say I don't know the name. I should say I might say so, and for sure, only I've heard it; and though the party that owned it never was lodger of mine, them that he knew were, only they aren't, that's true.'

'You will be so good, madame,' said the lady, in a foreign voice, 'to direct me to his apartments?'

'I'm very sorry, ma'am, if you're in want of lodgings, and if you've been recommended by Mr. Gordon, or anybody that knows me; but the room's been took these six weeks. But if you like to see them, as the gentleman's out——'

The lady clasped her hands impatiently. It was clear that her English was not after the speech of Saragossa Row.

Muir came to the rescue with his French of Paris.

'Can I be of any service to you, madame?'

'Ah, you speak with a tongue,' said she, in her French of Rome. 'Thank you, monsieur. I wish to see Monsieur Gordon. Is he at home?'

Muir frowned.

'I know him—I knew him, rather. But he does not live here. I believe he is abroad.'

'Abroad?'

'In Italy. His address is, "Walter Gordon, Poste Restante——"'

'Ah, you know him too? But it is not he; it is the musician——'

'I know of no other Gordon, at least, in London. A musician did live here.'

'Ah—that is he!'

'But his name——'

'I know. Tell me what he was like, monsieur. So he is gone? Ah, Prosper shall pay for this—Diaminé! It is war.'

'Perhaps I could serve you better, madame, if I knew why you wish to know,' said Muir, with the caution of his country.

'No—not at all. What was he like, if you please?'

Muir did not like the look of the lady at all. But what did it matter to him? The Marches had gone out of his life, and he did not intend them to return.

'A little man——' he paused. Description is never easy, when one tries.

'Ah—little, very little; short and lean, and black—he would be old now, and gray, with great brows, and deep, dead eyes, that cannot laugh, and a mouth—of iron, monsieur—that cannot smile; a man, fierce and cold, monsieur, but, per Bacco, a man! That is he?'

'You certainly have described him.'

'And here—he lived here?'

'Yes.'

'He must have been very poor.'

'He was very poor.'

'Ah! He was very poor. Yes, and old.' She looked round the shop again, and at Mrs. Snow, and through the door. 'Perhaps he had not bread?' she asked slowly.

'He lived, madame.'

'It is worse than the Ghetto,' she said absently. 'But perhaps he had friends?'

'He never went out; and he had no friends.'

'But you knew him?'

Muir was growing impatient. He had lost full five minutes of his day.

'No.'

'Did he not perform anywhere?'

'No. He was deaf, madame. Good-day.'

'Deaf! Ah, gran Dio! Deaf?'

'Stone deaf. Good——'

'Wait—one moment—one instant, monsieur! He is deaf—it is true—you know?'

'I am a surgeon, and in my judgment——'

'Yes——'

'He is not to be cured, but by miracle. You see, madame,' he went on, forgetting himself in the surgeon, 'I will not say that what people, the misguided bodies, call miracles, are not the commonest things; I should say that, on the average, ten or eleven miracles happen most days. But——'

'Then—he will never hear the Cleopatra?'

'I don't know what that will be, but if

he's to hear it, it will have to be louder than anything I ever heard. Good-day, madame.'

'Good-day, monsieur!' she held out her hand with a look of terrible triumph. 'Good-day, madame!' she said to Mrs. Snow, who would have given her ears to have understood French for a quarter of an hour. 'Poor—old—friendless—deaf!' she repeated to herself over and over again till the cab-wheels turned it into a pæan. 'He starves in a den, and will never hear the great work—the man that I hate too much to kill. Art! To crush women into a work that he will never hear! So much for Andrew Gordon.'

It was something for the childless, loveless woman to have lived for, even if she never saw the fate's vengeance on her life's murderer with her own eyes. 'Portatemi il diadema,' she began to sing to the harmony of the wheels. 'And now for Prosper.' Vengeance was taking form—Andrew Gordon should be deaf, not to the triumph of the Cleopatra, but to its damnation. Surely Heaven had indeed delivered her enemies into her hands.

CHAPTER V.

EAGLES AND FLIES.

'ILMA,' said Clari, on her return home, 'when is the first performance of Cleopatra?'

'You have seen Prosper, Giulia?'

Clari went to the glass, and took stock of herself deliberately. She knew perfectly well why Ilma had said, 'You have seen Prosper.' She looked flushed and brilliant, and at least ten years younger; Ilma had only been mistaken in thinking that her patroness had just returned from a battle instead of being on the eve of one.

'Yes; I have seen Prosper; but I did not ask him about the Cleopatra, because I would not have believed him if he had told me. I would not believe if he told me that

the sun shone. No; not even if I saw it shine with my own eyes. No; I would not believe the sun if he agreed with Prosper, Ilma?'

'Giulia?'

'You do not love Miss Celia?'

'Fräulein March?'

'You hate her, then—there.'

'Why should I hate her? I would as soon hate a cat—that's all.'

'A cat! No; I don't think one would hate a cat very much, if it did not trouble one. But if I did hate a cat I would say so. I hate a great many things—bad coffee, and stupid people, and trouble, and lies, and Prosper, and—and people that hate nothing. But, never mind. You are quite right, Carina. It is good, yes, it is wise, not to hate people until one is quite sure they cannot harm one. It is not wise to hate one's enemies, Carina, no; nor to love one's friends. One never knows what is to be. When is the first night of Cleopatra? Well, Prosper had his faults; but he was not stupid —no.'

'Do you mean you hate Fräulein March, Giulia?'

Clari lifted her shoulders with serene contempt—as the sun might had he shoulders, and were it suggested to him that he hated a farthing candle.

'I mean nothing at all, since you are so fond of her. Let us speak of other things. I will call on Lady Quorne.'

Ilma was stupid, being cunning; but, for the same reason, she had the compensating insight which makes up for want of brains. At any rate it was clear that, whether she hated Celia for the sake of old times or no, she had been ordered to hate the rival of her patroness almost as clearly as Fitz-Urse and his fellows had been ordered to rid the king of the Archbishop of Canterbury—for a woman's hint to a woman need not to be so direct as a man's to a man. There was, at any rate, so much of the royal about Clari as to concentrate her power of hating upon what seemed to her the greatest and strongest, and to turn it into the likeness of magnanimity by leaving her no hate to spare for rivals and other natural enemies, whom she was thus compelled to deal with by deputy—whence the value of Prosper, who had always

done all such dirty work for her without even letting her know that it was done. It was for her, like a sovereign, to decree 'Cleopatra shall fail!'—it was for meaner hands and narrower brains to save her the pains. Aquila non captat muscas—Eagles don't snap at flies. To crush Andrew Gordon and Cleopatra—high art and its arch-fiend together—was heroic enough to suit her sense of tragedy as well as her thirst for revenge; to ensure it by brushing out of the way such a fly as an English soprano was for meaner hands. Ilma thought, so far as nature had given her the power—not very far, but far enough for practical results, if not for the comprehension of reasons.

'Yes,' she said with decision; 'I do hate Fräulein March. I always did; from the very minute she came to Lindenheim.'

'The very minute? Then he made love to her the very minute she came to Lindenheim!'

'No, Giulia; she made love to him. I mean——'

'Ah? But never mind; it is all the same who begins. I should like to know what it

means to be in love, Ilma. It would be nice —for a change. But I suppose it would tire, like all other things. I thought it would be nice, once, to have diamonds in my ears. I don't care for them any more. I am tired of having things in my ears—especially Casta Diva and——' She went to the looking-glass again, and took out her earrings. 'There! you shall have them, Ilma. And now I will go and call on Lady Quorne.'

And so, without one word of plain English, French, or Italian, the fiasco of Celia, the only soprano on earth capable of singing Cleopatra, was discussed, settled, bargained, and in part paid for. Translated into any sort of word-language, Clari had said: 'Miss Celia is in my way, and eagles may not stoop to flies—sparrows may. I am an eagle, you are a sparrow, Miss Celia is a fly. You are not so clever as Prosper; but jealousy, stimulated by diamonds, should make the stupidest woman outdo the cleverest man.'

In one respect she wronged Ilma. That young lady was incapable of what Clari meant by hate—real hate is a passion, like real love, and almost as rare. Clari knew it,

and judged others by her own tragic standard. But Ilma had what, for the purpose, did just as well—an old grudge and a long memory. The walk to Waaren rankled still, and the sense of her own recent failure turned jealousy into envy. She took the diamonds, and was fired with the liveliest sense of favours to come. What could be more natural than that a prima donna should wish to ensure the immediate failure of a rival, whose years were fewer than her own? She, too, judged by her own standard; and perhaps the smaller nature, as often happens, understood the larger better than the larger comprehended the small. For while the little can have no greatnesses, the great must needs have a thousand littlenesses.

So Ilma took the diamonds—the outward symbols of the broken bargain that Noëmi Baruc had made with her arch-enemy. But it was not enough to take them; she must earn not only these, but more, and she must earn them well. It is all very well for a queen to say to her minister, Go and conquer my enemy. The minister should, to be of any use, be more than a penniless dependent,

a foreign singer without a name, a mere drop in the sea of London, without friends, or influence, or talents, or the means of buying them. But it is by instinct that genius knows its instruments, not by reason. Once more, if a woman, fired by envy, jealousy, disappointment and diamonds, cannot, in such a case, dispense with all else, be she as poor as Job and as foreign as Clari in Saragossa Row, it must be that she has scruples; and from that disadvantage Mademoiselle Krasinska was absolutely free. It is even an advantage to be stupid, for brains make up in scruples for what they gain by skill.

It is likely enough that nobody on earth cared for the Gavestons—except the Gavestons. But then, much the same may be said of most people.

Somehow or other, as time went on, neither the influence nor the income of the curate of St. Anselm's expanded with his expanding needs. It is true that little Bessy was still alone in the nursery, but not likely that she would remain alone much longer. A connection with Hinchford did not seem

to benefit the Swanns any more than a connection with the family of the auctioneer had been of service to its aristocratic member. The rarity of his visits to his cousin Alicia by no means satisfied his parishioners; indeed it would have been worldly-wise in him if he had gained flavour for his sermons, as well as health for himself, by taking a walk in the Hinchford direction every Friday afternoon, putting up at The Five Adzes, and not returning till Saturday morning. Once indeed, the countess called in her carriage upon Mrs. Gaveston, but she proved so utterly unlike the countess as described by the curate, that the honour did him little good in the long-run, especially among the stationers who dealt in photographs, and whose trade he had well-nigh spoiled. It is one thing to be a popular curate, when unmarried, to even one of fifteen young ladies who meet to hear one read Locksley Hall aloud; but it was doubtful now if the curate of St. Anselm's, had he been the finest reader alive, could have reckoned upon a larger audience than the two Bessies.

And changes were beginning to take place

even in Deepweald. Nobody had as yet even begun to hint that to pull down the cathedral and build it up again would be good for trade. But the oldest and most respected inhabitant of the city had died, and had been succeeded by an inhabitant even older and yet more respectable; a chimney had been on fire in College Court; and, altogether, the city had been by no means without its history. Among incidents of hardly less importance than these, the curate, at Bessy's wiser suggestion and with her help, had written straight to the earl and asked him if he could not do something for the countess's cousin. Nothing is too minute to be included in the chronicles of Deepweald, supposing it to be necessary that every city should have its chronicles. Reginald did not like the task, for he was a bad hand at letter-writing, and a still worse at begging; but Bessy had no such scruples, and honestly believed, even after nearly three years of marriage, that her husband was fit to be bishop of the diocese. The see was not vacant, but at any rate they might make him a dean, and even a good living, at a sufficient distance to give her rank

as the rector's wife rather than the auctioneer's daughter, would be worth accepting as a step to better things.

It had been a great piece of business, writing that letter to Lord Quorne, and called for a separate discussion over almost every word. Reginald could write a sermon in half an hour at a pinch; but then it does not much matter how one spells sermons. Making a petition to a peer is a different kind of matter altogether. But at last the letter was not only written but sent, to the curate's intense relief. Bessy watched every post, but he felt that he had done his duty by his family, and that nobody could henceforth complain if he let himself vegetate at St. Anselm's henceforth and for ever. He would always be able to say, 'I have done my best; I have done all I can.'

For many days Bessy's sanguine confidence in the effect of such a triumph of literary skill as that letter acted upon the postman, like watching upon a pot that is meant to boil. Her husband's eye was beginning to say to her, 'There; I knew nothing would come.' She began to give up saying, when-

ever the postman rang, 'There! perhaps that is a letter from the earl.' Presently she began to give up thinking it even, and was even beginning to imagine that it would never have been written if her advice had been followed.

The phonology of knockers is a science, but there is not much more character about rings than about the so-called Italian hand that ladies practised twenty years ago. The Gavestons—trifles must be made the most of in Deepweald—had only a bell. But nevertheless there was no mistaking for the postman's clatter the quick tinkle that might, and did, announce Miss Hayward—who was Miss Hayward still. Had she been otherwise, the chronicler of Deepweald would have no need to descend to trifles for lack of more remarkable matter.

Miss Hayward, though not popular, was always welcome. Her secret was, that wherever she went, she carried news. In ancient Athens she would have been simply invaluable.

'I'm so sorry Mr. Gaveston is not at home,' she said, after disposing of the weather and

little Bessy. 'Something has happened which I'm not sure ought not to shock one; only of course one doesn't want to be shocked without being sure that one ought to be.'

'Of course not!' said Bessy Gaveston. 'I'm sure nobody wants to be shocked less than I do. What is it—nothing too dreadful?'

'I don't know, I'm sure. People think differently now about things than what they used to. I don't mean Mr. Gaveston, my dear.'

'I should think not—I'm sure Reginald never thinks different; never. He doesn't hold with any of the new ideas—he never even reads them.'

'No. I don't object to a clergyman preaching in a surplice—not at all, though I ought to tell you, as a friend, that I know it for a fact that there are people in St. Anselm's that do. It does look high, to be sure; but then one can't possibly approve of what's low. After all, St. Anselm's isn't St. Botolph's, and it's proper to show that we can pay for our washing. What I object to is—you remember Celia March, Bessy?'

'Poor Celia March? Of course I do. What about her?'

'I always did—I never did approve of you and Mr. Gaveston making so much of that girl. Of course it wasn't for me to say anything at the time, for I never give my opinion till it's asked for; that's like locking the stable-door before the horse is stolen, you know, and that's a thing I never did, and, therefore, I never will. But I never did approve of those girls with eyes like saucers. There's always sure to be something behind; and when people aren't like their neighbours, they are pretty safe to be different from others—mark my words.'

'Good gracious, Miss Hayward! What has she done?'

'Oh, nothing, my dear. It's nothing to me what people do. Only I thought, if you still correspond with her, that you, as a clergyman's wife, ought to do it with your eyes open, that's all. P'r'aps, if you weren't a clergyman's wife, and bound to keep yourself select, I wouldn't say a word now; for people do all sorts of things now that in my time they'd have been turned their backs on

for, and never spoken to again. People mayn't mind preaching in surplices, for about that there's two opinions, and I can't say I disapprove; but when clergymen's wives associate with actresses and such-like, why then—well, people will talk, my dear; and quite right too.'

'Good gracious, Miss Hayward! Celia March turned actress? Why I'd as soon—it's too dreadful; it can't be. Oh, I am sorry. But, I assure you, I have lost sight of her for ever so long—I have indeed.'

'I'm glad to hear it, I'm sure,' said Miss Hayward, shortly. 'I'm very glad indeed. I saw it in the papers. She's going to act in something called Cleopatra, who was a most improper person, as I happen to know; she's going to act in London, in The Times. She drank vinegar, you know, and was killed by an aspic—but you know what I mean; it's all in The Guide to Knowledge, and——'

'A letter for master, ma'am,' said the housemaid, bringing in a letter on a tray.

'Very well, Mary; put it down. Oh, I am so sorry!' said Bessy. 'Poor Celia!'

'Poor, indeed!' said Miss Hayward. 'But

there's one comfort; one knows what they come to. If it wasn't for that, who'd be respectable, I should like to know? But I'm glad you don't know anything about her, Bessy, for yours and Mr. Gaveston's sake; very glad indeed. I thought you'd be sure to know all about it, or else I wouldn't have mentioned it, I'm sure.' Miss Hayward wore no spectacles, and needed none; and her eyes were upon the letter which Mary had laid upon the table, address downwards. 'And how,' she asked, 'by-the-way, is the Countess of Quorne?'

'Oh, very well, I believe. But I was thinking of Celia, poor girl.'

'My dear, in such cases, pity is thrown away. I want to hear about the countess. Of course you often hear from her?'

'Well—no—that is—ah!' exclaimed Bessy, suddenly feeling her heart leap as she caught sight of a coronet and the letter 'Q.' 'Yes, there is a letter from the earl—for Reginald. Oh dear—I wish——' and she examined the envelope, as if the postmarks could tell her what was within.

'Pray don't mind me,' said Miss Hayward politely.

'It is for Reginald—I must wait till he comes. I wonder—yes, I knew it was only a matter of time. Miss Hayward—I'm afraid—I hope—Reginald won't be curate of St. Anselm's very long.'

'Indeed! That is news! I congratulate you, Bessy dear, with all my heart—I do indeed! Where shall you go?'

'I don't know yet—I don't know what the earl has done. But I was sure he would do something—sure!'

'My dear, with such influence, Mr. Gaveston ought to be a bishop in time.'

Bessy was doubly pleased that the letter had come at last, in such a manner that all Deepweald would hear of the coronet and the letter 'Q.' Independently of the triumph of her sagacity, her aristocratic prestige was whitewashed in the city for at least nine days to come; for ten days it would have been, had she been polite enough to treat the letter as a matter of course, and piqued her visitor's interest by saying nothing. But Bessy Gaveston was, after all, but a simple soul.

'And, indeed,' Miss Hayward went on, 'even now it may be to make him a colonial.

They're making colonials everywhere—even among the Cannibals.'

'Oh, Miss Hayward, surely——'

'I am told, my dear, on high authority, that there were few people who stand in greater need of improvement than the Cannibals. I have always been of opinion that to show a Cannibal the error of his ways should be a great satisfaction to a well-constituted mind like yours. And their climate is most delightful, I believe; and then colonials get plenty of holidays, and their anecdotes are most delightful.'

Bessy's heart was beginning to fall again. She could not quite remember in what latitude and longitude, according to her geography book, the Cannibals live, but she thought of Bessy the younger, and felt that even episcopal dignity might be bought too dear. She wished Reginald would come home.

'But perhaps,' went on Miss Hayward, 'you will have work at home. Perhaps you will be thrown among drunkenness, and crime, and all sorts of shocking things. I have often thought that Mr. Gaveston's talents were

thrown away on a quiet place like St. Anselm's. That's what I should like if I was a clergyman's wife, Bessy—to get a lot of tipsy men together and give them a good talking to. They'd be thankful to me, when I'd done. Ah —Mr. Gaveston—let me congratulate you !'

'Miss Hayward ? I'm delighted, I'm sure,' said Gaveston, who entered his own house without ringing. 'Well, Bessy—anything happened ? Ah—a letter from—yes, it's from my cousin Alicia.' He looked at Bessy, as if to gain courage from her humble gray eyes. 'Well—anyway, here goes ! Heads or—I should say, we'll see. "DEAR MR. GAVESTON,— The pressing parliamentary duties," '—he ran his eyes down the letter : Bessy watched his face eagerly, but gathered no more than from the postmarks. Miss Hayward also watched, with the interest which only reaches its climax when taken in the affairs of others. At last he handed the open letter to his wife with a sigh. 'There, Bessy. Well, Miss Hayward —and how goes the world with you ?'

'I am to congratulate you, I trust, Mr. Gaveston ?'

'Oh yes.' But he pulled his whiskers so ab-

sently that Miss Hayward almost fancied he had said, 'Oh no.'

Meanwhile Bessy read:

'DEAR MR. GAVESTON,—The pressing parliamentary duties of Lord Quorne have prevented his answering you earlier. We are quite delighted to hear that you and Mrs. Gaveston are well, and shall hope to have the pleasure of making her acquaintance ere long. Indeed it is for that reason that I write to you instead of Lord Quorne, as I want both you and Mrs. Gaveston to be of real service to me. As to your letter, Lord Quorne's church influence is long ago disposed of, and will not, in all likelihood, be open again for a long time. You may be sure that, whenever it is in his power, my husband will not forget my kinsman and old friend. Meanwhile, what I ask you is for me; and my request is addressed to Mrs. Gaveston as much as to you. A young lady, Miss Celia March, in whom I am deeply interested, is about to make her first appearance this season on the operatic stage. Indeed if I am not mistaken, you met her last year at Hinchford; and you must have known her father,

who was organist at Deepweald. I need not tell you that a girl like her, thrown suddenly into the midst of our profession'—'Our profession!' wondered Bessy; but she read on—'into the midst of our profession requires to live respectably and does not find it easy. Her father is infirm—deaf, in fact—and she has no other relations. I want to find her a home among friends, for the season, where she will feel at home, and I absolutely don't know what to do with her. She cannot lodge alone; that would never do. Her father has a rooted objection to her holding the least communication with artists or professional people off the stage; and he is, as perhaps you may know, the most obstinate man whom I ever knew. On receiving your letter, it struck me that Mrs. Gaveston might not object to spend a season in town, with an old acquaintance for a companion. Will she? I hope she will. I suppose some one can take your Sunday duties—indeed, I can find you a clergyman who will be only too happy, and it will be a great thing for Miss March. Indeed, I don't know what else to do. You will have to take lodgings in a good part of the town, where

Miss March may have plenty of fresh air, and yet be within easy reach of the theatre. You will also require to hire a brougham. My coachman will manage all that for you. Miss March is, for a day or two, staying with me. It will be best if you will arrange to come up on Monday, when you shall find lodgings ready for you. Of course you will be at no expense to yourself during your stay. Mrs. Gaveston will please to accept the enclosed, for immediate requirements, from her husband's old friend, kinswoman, and sincere well-wisher,

'ALICIA QUORNE.'

Bessy turned red and pale. She glanced at Miss Hayward. To be the chaperon of an actress, after all? She looked at Reginald. To be in London for the season; to go to Quorne House; to keep a brougham; to spend, all at once, a cheque for a hundred pounds? Mrs. Swann's daughter's head turned and swam. The eyes of Reginald and Bessy met, and said, 'Well?' and 'Well?'

But there was only one answer. When Lady Quorne underscored 'I hope,' it

was for her poor relations to read 'I command.'

'Well, Bessy,' said Miss Hayward, 'I see you have things to talk about, so I won't stay tea to-day. I only came to tell you about Celia March; that's all.'

'I think—I think,' stammered Bessy, looking at her husband, 'that—that, in fact—— Is it so wrong, Reginald, to be on the stage?'

'It entirely depends upon circumstances,' said the curate, ex cathedrâ. 'I can humbly conceive of circumstances which may make it wrong for a man to be a shoemaker; but one may be quite satisfied that if—if, in short, a lady like, say Lady Quorne, goes to a shoemaker for her shoes, that he is a good shoemaker; and a shoemaker is a man, and therefore a good shoemaker is a good man. And, by Butler's analogy, the same rule applies.'

'I am very glad to hear it,' said Miss Hayward. 'Very glad indeed.'

CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE RIFT.

So, at last, Celia, in spite of herself, had developed into a prima donna—nay, into the open and declared rival of the great Clari herself, with all her memories of that concert at Deepweald, exaggerated by distance of time, to drag her down. Assuredly every road leads not only to Rome, but to everywhere. Noëmi Baruc from the Ghetto, Celia from the Cathedral Close; the born queen and the born nobody; the open enemy of art and its docile slave, were pitted against one another in a formal contest, which seemed likely to become one of the fifteen thousand decisive battles of the operatic world.

There was little going on that season to

distract the attention of musical people from their proper topics. People may think that these are not very large, and indeed scarcely a sufficient cause for much excitement among men and women who, having ears, must necessarily have heads; and, having heads, must be presumed to have something more than emptiness inside them. But facts have nothing to do with reasons. It is quite possible to go through life without taking the faintest interest in Wagnerism, or spiritualism, or the spelling reform; but if the foot once crosses the threshold of one or the other, in goes the whole man, body and soul, and there is no help for him. So may an Earl of Quorne regard the whole universe as contained in a prize cucumber, and his countess look upon a duel between prime donne as a veritable Armageddon. Where a countess leads, at least a hundred will follow; and a hundred people are quite enough to constitute a world. And so it may be said that the eyes of the world were upon Celia—of all women in the world.

A great deal had happened, more than can be told in any number of volumes fewer than

four, since she and the dream of her heart had finally been laid upon that all-devouring altar of destiny called Cleopatra. But Celia herself would have found one word more than enough wherein to tell it all—to her, it was not a history; it was a hurricane. She had never had much scope for the exercise of free will; now, she had none. The spirit of her father, intensified by a lifetime of suppression and concentration, fairly rushed out to meet the coming triumph half-way; it swept away with it Prosper like a heap of dust, Lady Quorne like a bundle of feathers, Celia like a single straw. How, she neither knew nor asked; it was not in her philosophy to speculate over the masterfulness of a great spirit on the rebound, and of its intense directness of course and singleness of aim over the atmosphere of frivolity and knavery in which it had to expand. A triton among minnows is but a poor simile for Andrew Gordon among Prospers and Lady Quornes. He even hurled earnestness into the green-room and enthusiasm into the drawing-room, and gained for his fierce and narrow personality the sympathy that only comes from power. One can only

dash in the large results of his influence, which cut through details and threw them aside right and left like wooden splinters before a round saw worked by steam. Much might be learned of it from the talk at rehearsals, where the deaf man came daily and mesmerised the conductor's bâton with his dull and deep-set eyes. But all could only be learned by the absence of talk, which meant the presence of action. Somehow the most callous chorus-singer seemed to feel that the Cleopatra meant something more than an extra drill—and more than that no chorus-singer could be expected to feel. Prosper had managed Clari by stooping to conquer; he could not manage this new master at all. But he was amply content to feel that the triumph of Cleopatra was foregone. There was more than the common interest attaching to the re-appearance of a famous composer, after a sullen retirement which had for so long made him dead except in the world of memories. That was much; but Andrew Gordon had come back to life, not only with the prestige of a ghost, but with the energy of a demon.

How should a girl's dream stand in the

way of a strong man's will? It was incredible, and it seemed too impossible to be worth regarding. Celia seemed to see the poor little white wings of the bird that had come to sing in her heart swept away helplessly in the whirlwind; she might strain her eyes after it with longing, but there was no moment for reaching out her hands to keep it back—it was gone. Her father could see nothing but Cleopatra, and had forgotten his desperate lapse into mere human sympathy as if it had never been, and as a healthy man forgets a disease. Since the Score had been gathered up again from its four corners, all the days had rushed by as if they had been only one day of chaos—if chaos has anything to do with days. They had left Saragossa Row. Had Celia ever lived there, except in a dream? Walter had vanished. Then she had found herself a guest of Lady Quorne; and she had scarcely breathing-time enough for it to go to her heart that her father, even for Cleopatra's sake, could so readily let her go so entirely out of his days. Was she his child after all? Or only a wheel in some inexorable machine, of which the sole purpose

was to turn out the Cleopatra, and then to break up and be done with for good and all? She, alone, felt no more enthusiasm for the result than a wheel does for the work of a steam-engine. She had to move as force bade—that was all. Then came the details —rehearsals and Prosper. And, at last, without knowing how or why, the new prima donna assoluta, of whom at least a hundred people spoke for at least ten minutes every day—which is the English for fame—found herself sitting in Lady Quorne's carriage beside Bessy Gaveston.

It was the first minute in which she had time to stretch her thoughts since, in Saragossa Row, her whole time was spent in that barren vacuum which passes for thinking; every road must indeed lead everywhere to bring Celia March and Bessy Swann together again under the wing of the Countess of Quorne.

'Celia?' said the chaperon timidly, as if she had put out her voice to touch Celia with instead of her finger, and was afraid of breaking her. She had never spoken to an actress in her life; and yet she could not quite

reconcile the two ideas of her old protégée being at one and the same time an actress, and Celia March of the Close whose shabbiness, shyness, and awkwardness she remembered as long as she could remember anything. She felt as old schoolfellows might, when the fellow who could turn off elegiacs like Ovid, and bowl like Reginald Gaveston, after a few years of steady and respectable failure, becomes private secretary to a great man who was his own fag, and who was famous for nothing but false quantities, and for the qualities for which schoolboy humour has invented many forcible but not over delicate names. In whatever way it comes, it is a strange feeling—perhaps, the strangest of all that there are. 'If I had met you in the very street, I shouldn't have known you,' said Bessy, for the sake of saying something very strong indeed. 'But—oh dear, what has happened? Why, you are crying, Celia! Aren't you glad to see somebody from Deepweald again? And there is little Bessy at home, though she's in bed now——'

'Oh, please, please, Bessy,' said Celia between sobs, 'please don't notice—don't

mind. I shall be better in a minute—I shall indeed. Not glad to see you? Oh, Bessy, I wish—I wish the carriage would drive on and on until we got to Deepweald, and I could get out there and go back into our old house and find everything the same as it used to be when——' 'When I was so miserable,' she could only have said, had she left her sentence broken. 'I should like to cry myself to sleep, and then go to sleep for the rest of my days.'

'For the rest of your nights, you mean? There—never mind; it does everybody good to have a cry now and then. Only you never used to cry, or to laugh, or do anything like anybody when you were a girl—but it is all so strange. I'm sure, if I had been told that I should ever dine with Lady Quorne in London, I shouldn't have believed them.'

'Indeed, you mustn't think I'm not glad to see you!' said Celia. 'It feels like going home, so much—so much, that I want to be there. I am so tired. I want to hear the rooks and the organ, and just go to sleep——'

'Yes—and I'm tired, too. But, thank goodness, there's no need to get up to-morrow

morning before we like, and we can have breakfast just as late as we please. I hope the man's driving us right? But I wonder at your wanting to go back to Deepweald. I don't—not yet, any way. I wish Reginald would get something in London—perhaps he will, as Lady Quorne seems so kind; not a bit like a countess, and she asked after little Bessy just like anybody might. There—you're better now you've had your cry out, aren't you?'

But it was not a light thing for Celia to cry—the relief came so late as to be in itself bodily pain. Her heart was a reservoir, where the tears for which well-nigh every day had served for a spring, had been gathering for years without an outlet, or rather had been frozen while they gathered. With her father in her life, or with her life in his, she had never dared to break down in this way; the spirit of the Score, present always and everywhere, had called for a tension too harsh and constant to allow of tears. It had given her even false strength enough to force herself through that evening's dinner, though she had felt a hard lump come into

her throat as soon as she met the Gavestons in the drawing-room. Bessy, wherever she might be, and under whatever conditions, looked like a woman who had come straight from home, and her alliance with the peerage had not deprived her voice of the tone of her native county. But when she rolled away from the company in a carriage with springs as smooth as those of a dream, and saw through the window the gas-lamps and their suggestive flare in contrast with the picture of a quiet white moon over tall elms that Bessy had brought her from homeland, what could she do but give in and cry? Her father was not there, and Bessy was a mother, as everybody soon learned—though not her own. She sat up straight, which brought her a timid inch nearer to little Bessy's mother's wing.

'I wish I were little Bessy,' said Celia.

'Do you? What an odd thing to say.'

'Is it?'

'But you always were saying and doing odd things. My father used very often to talk about you——'

'Tell me, Bessy—am I so very unlike

everybody? I wish—I wish I was like you.'

'Yes; you always were quite unlike anybody I ever knew—your skin was so dark, and your eyes were so large, and you never even had a flirtation,' said Bessy, reaching at once the climax of singularity, and ignorant that, according to Mademoiselle Krasinska, Celia had been the deepest-dyed flirt in Lindenheim. 'You never seemed even to have a girl-friend. But, of course, as you have gone on the stage, that accounts for it all. I wonder what it would feel like to be on the stage? Reginald has a wonderful memory, except when he forgets things; but I should forget all I had to say at the first word, and stand staring at the people till they wondered what I was there for. No—I don't think you'd like to be me. I think I should like to be you, just to feel what it's like, you know. I don't mean I should like to be a real actress, because that would hardly do. What fun you must have, to be sure.'

Evil communications were already beginning to corrupt the good manners of St.

Anselm's—to have dined with a peeress and to be riding home with a prima donna was clearly not good for Bessy. But then those who are compelled to live at home with extra sobriety have surely some little right to put one toe over the traces when they go abroad.

Meanwhile Celia was creeping closer, half-inch by half-inch, under the wing of Mrs. Gaveston, whose mere presence felt like a peaceful rest after those long weeks of whirl. And there was more sympathy between them than any physiognomist would suppose who judged one by her quiet gray eyes and round pink face, and the other by her eyes of dark splendour and her southern colouring. As all real physiognomists know, the rules of physiognomy are all and always wrong, except when they are right; so that they are doubly untrustworthy. It is to be feared that the new prima donna was uncomfortably like a plain, homely, thatched cottage, which should stand in a garden of common wall-flowers and cabbage-roses, but whose owner had buried it among strange-looking ferns, filled its window-frames with stained glass and labelled it

grandly after his ambitious fancy. There was plenty of hearth-room for lighting a home-fire, but the feeble taper, which alone had been as yet lighted, only looked wonderful from the outside because of the colours through which it shone. Her eyes might be strangely like her great rival's in their southern depth and glow, but it was a simple English soul that looked out through them—as plain and simple as Bessy Gaveston's own. And the idea of fun for her in being torn and dragged into the glare out of her shell! It is true that Celia had never yet learned what is meant by fun, but the word touched a new chord, and stung her.

'Oh, I do hate it all so!' her whole nature cried out loud in her, and with an energy that for the moment scared her chaperon. 'No—I oughtn't to say it; I have never said a word like that before, and—but I do. Bessy, please!'

Even Bessy was wise enough, if for nothing else, to feel the cry go through her, and to feel the tears come into her own heart, at the prayer of a shy sister-soul for a few crumbs of common love and sympathy. 'Bessy—

please,' told even her a bitter tale of a life that begged dumbly for a look or a touch as if for a great thing that she dared not hope for, much less demand. The chaperon's arm was as wise as her heart; it went out, and round Celia's waist, as she said:

'What—you hate being on the stage? Then why do you go on it? Of course I thought you liked it, or you wouldn't be there.'

'I must, Bessy—but never mind."

'But I do mind—there. If I didn't want to do a thing like that, I wouldn't, and wild horses shouldn't make me.'

'Don't speak of it any more, please. I oughtn't to have said a word.'

'But I will—and you ought, Celia. I thought people turned actors and actresses because they liked it; it can't be nice to make believe to be somebody else, and learn long speeches and things, if one doesn't like to.'

'But people have to live in all sorts of ways they don't like, Bessy.'

'Is that why you go on the stage?'

'No—not now.'

'Then——?'

'I must—that's all.'

'Oh dear! But you never were like anybody. Do you mean Mr. March makes you?'

'No—but I have to.'

'Yes. And when you were a child you had to get up and practise at six in cold frosty mornings—and you never had a day's rest or pleasure—and he used'—'to beat you,' she was going to say, according to the traditions of Deepweald, but checked himself. 'I know. We had a girl once who lived with you, and she used to say you led the life of a gallows slave. And now it's the same story, I suppose.'

'No!' said Celia. 'My father has done right, always—he is doing right now. It is wicked of me to hate anything but not trying to do my best and hardest for him. Oh, Bessy, you don't know—you can't know! But oh, it is terrible to feel that the Cleopatra depends on me.'

'You sing very nicely, I know, Celia, or else Lady Quorne wouldn't think so. But couldn't anybody else sing in this thing of his

if you don't like to? I don't wonder at your being frightened—I know I should be.'

'No—nobody but me. You don't know how it has been. He has spent his whole life in writing this part and training me for it, so that he could be sure it would be sung just as he pleased. I didn't understand it all once—but I do now. I only wish I had no voice, Bessy—or I wish I could make myself not care; and then I'd go through it if it killed me, without minding anything or being afraid.'

'But can't anybody else learn the songs? Couldn't he teach somebody else, like he taught you?'

'In twenty years? Cleopatra comes out in seven days—only six days now.'

'Oh, what a sigh! But do you mean to tell me it takes a professional twenty years to learn two or three songs? Why Mr. March once taught me four songs in one week——'

'Yes,' said Celia hastily, not caring to dwell upon her father's peculiar method with the amateurs of Deepweald; 'but there's another reason why nobody could take my

place, even if anyone could study the Cleopatra in six days——'

'Well?'

'Don't you remember he is deaf, Bessy? No—there is no help for it; none. He has gone through with it, and so must I. Yes—I must; and I will.'

'Well, all I can say is, that I don't understand. Except that Mr. March is a—— Never mind. I don't understand how it can take more fuss to sing a song, than to preach a sermon; and I don't know what would become of St. Anselm's, if Reginald took twenty years over every time he preaches. I'm pretty sure some of them would go to sleep before he'd done. But I suppose Lady Quorne knows. You ought to get married, Celia.'

'No.'

'But yes, I say. You've got no mother, nor father—for Mr. March doesn't count—not a soul belonging to you. It isn't natural; and, for all you're so clever, I see now you're no more fit to go on the stage than my little Bessy—poor little darling. I wish you knew how to flirt, like other girls. What has be-

come of that young man who knew you abroad, and once called on me at Deepweald, and who knows Lady Quorne ?'

What indeed ? When she had set her lips and said, 'I will,' she was thinking of something else than the Cleopatra ; her crying-fit had left her heart perilously softened ; and her will was needed, for more than aught else, to harden it against a growing vision of what might have been, which to her was grander, in its rest and tenderness, than all the worship of art and all the glory of song. If she could not feel the single-hearted enthusiasm for the great cause with which her father inspired others, it was because she was feeling the loss of what she had only just begun to know. The one friend whom she trusted without question had failed her, and left her in what others called her coming glory, but which she knew to be her utmost need. If she had dismissed him for duty's sake, what then ? A girl has not to learn that a man who loves does not accept such dismissals. Where was he, if his words had ever meant anything more than empty air ? The Score was all that was left her ; it was indeed a case of 'must' and 'will.'

'He seemed very nice,' said Bessy meditatively, 'and he was at Oxford with Reginald. And I really don't know who else to think of for you. The young men in Deepweald are not nice at all—quite a different sort than they used to be when I was a girl. But here we are. And I declare there is Reginald, just at the door. Here we are, you see. How have you been enjoying yourself at your friend's? I'll tell you all about Lady Quorne's when I've put Celia to bed; she's tired, and I promised Lady Quorne to make her keep early hours.'

'Glad to see you again, Miss March,' said the curate, helping her from the carriage a little clumsily. 'So you're in training, eh? I've been at the Temple seeing my old friend Tom Bloxam—you know, my dear—of Brasenose, who made the biggest score in my time; and it was just like old times, and we had some capital songs. Ah, it's a good thing to get out of Deepweald once in a blue moon; occasionally, you know.'

'The biggest score?' asked Celia, wearily and absently echoing the too familiar word.

'Yes—a hundred and twenty, and not out.

What a—bother this latch-key is, to be sure. But I shall learn the trick in time. There. So you've enjoyed yourselves? That's all right. You're looking very well, Miss March, and I'm delighted to see you. Bessy will be a mother to you, I know, and I'll be a father. What's this letter on the candlestick? Just look at the address, Bessy, there's a good girl—the air seems to have got into my eyes.'

'It's for you, Celia.'

Celia was not unused to letters now. Prosper had occasion to write to her most days, especially now that the field-night was so near. But this was in German, and smelled of Lindenheim.

'DEAR MISS MARCH'—she read by the light of her bedroom candle, while Bessy stood watching her husband as he vainly struck his fourteenth match to light theirs—'I am just come to London with an engagement, and of course I have heard the first thing of the great things you are going to do. I send a thousand congratulations to the star of Lindenheim—our star. I got your address at the theatre, for I want so much to see you

again, if a great prima donna like you will condescend to remember a humble comprimaria like me. I will come and see you to-morrow morning, on the chance of your having time for five minutes' talk about old times. Thine with all my heart,

'ILMA KRASINSKA.'

It was natural enough; for Lindenheim meant brotherhood and sisterhood all over the world, not the less fully because brothers and sisters now and then hate one another. Celia had no unkindly recollection of her fellow-student. But could Prosper have read the soul of that letter he would have trembled; and Andrew Gordon's dream of glory for art would have turned into a nightmare. Ilma was only Ilma; but, if eagles scorn flies too much, eagles are not wise.

CHAPTER VII.

FEY.

THE Gavestons were a little late next morning. Celia was down a full hour before Bessy, and spent it in a most needless private rehearsal; for she had been note-perfect and letter-perfect long ago. But her sense of responsibility was more than a burden; except for her persistent trust in Walter, which obstinately refused to be killed, her duty to the score was all that seemed to be left her in the whole wide world. She dreamed of it night and day, and worked at it as if she were still a child at Deepweald.

'Good-morning!' said Bessy, and kissed her. The curate's wife had slept off Lady Quorne, and had dreamed of nothing more

exciting than of the other Bessy, and that pleasantly. It was a bright spring morning, such as gives town-mice day-dreams of fields where no dust is, and where the sunbeams smell of cowslips instead of water-carts; and such as makes country-mice think London the sweetest spot in the world. 'It is very near May, you know,' Lady Quorne had said yesterday evening, 'and it is just as seasonable for a clergyman to be in town for the May meetings, and to bring his womankind, as for a lay-woman to be in London for the opera, and to bring her incumbrances'—thinking, when she saw what manner of person Mrs. Gaveston proved to be, that some clerical excuse might be required for her chaperonage of a prima donna. But Bessy had thrown over all such scruples long ago, and felt that, being in for the penny, she might just as well be in for the pound, and be hung for a sheep as well as for a lamb—and better.

'What shall we do to-day?' she asked, without waiting for an answer to her good-morning. 'I have made such a list of things that I don't know where to begin. Of course,

you know everything, Celia, so it doesn't matter to you, and Reginald has been in London lots of times. Let me see—I've got to call on my cousins in Brixton; and I've wanted to see a mummy ever since I was born; and it would never do to go back without seeing the Queen and the royal family—I wonder what's the best way to see the Queen? And I want to drive in the Park, and there are all mamma's errands, and of course one must see the sights; the proper ones, you know; the Wax-works, and Westminster Abbey, and the Zoological Gardens, and all the things of that sort. But my cousins will keep to some Sunday when there's nothing else to do, and one can do the regular things any day—the Thames Tunnel, and the Dulwich Gallery, and all that. They don't matter so long as one doesn't go back without having seen them. And the mummy—well, mummies will keep a little longer still, I should think. On the whole, I think the best thing we can do to-day is to do some shopping. It was quite impossible to get things in Deepweald, though, of course, we had to spend something in the town. We'll

go into all the bonnet-shops, and see everything they've got, and take our time, and have a real good day to begin. We'll see every bonnet in London—every one. Don't dawdle over your breakfast, Reginald, and we'll start just as soon as ever we can.'

But the curate was inclined to dawdle. After his own dissipation of last night, he had a far from unpleasant next morning feeling which reminded him of Oxford, and he was inclined to prolong the sensation.

'Bessy, my dear, what would you say if I proposed our going to every hatter's in town?'

'I should say you were a goose; because you can see hats in Deepweald every day. But bonnets—unless you think Miss Hayward wears a bonnet; she calls it one, and you might believe her, being a man. No; you don't see bonnets in Deepweald, not even on me; but you shall. But then I must choose one; and when one has to take such a step as that, one can't begin too soon to make up one's mind. One may never have such a responsibility again.'

Mrs. Gaveston had no sense of humour,

and spoke in all gravity; the curate had less than none, and Celia less than less than none, if such a depth may be. Neither could deny that Bessy's views of duty were as orthodox as they were profound. But, nevertheless, that long, unbroken vista of bonnet-shops did not look to the curate's mind very much like a holiday, and he sighed.

'I think, my dear, I'll leave it to you. There are one or two men I must look up, you know.'

Bessy had better than humour; she had good-humour.

'You don't care to come? I dare say Celia and I will manage very well by ourselves. Come in.'

A lady to see Miss March; announced by her card as 'Ilma Krasinska.'

Instantly Bessy Gaveston knew that, without even having gone so far as Regent Street, she had seen her ideal—a head-gear of white lace and ostrich plumes, calculated to turn the heads and inflame the hearts of all Deepweald. It was long before her eyes travelled so low as the eyebrows of Mademoiselle Krasinska.

Lady Quorne herself would not have worn a more sweetly exquisite bonnet, she was sure. But the curate's eyes started lower; and they were not particularly pleased with Celia's friend. She recalled the sowing of somewhat wilder oats than he cared to remember, felt that Lady Quorne was right in thinking a chaperon needful for Celia, and not best pleased that his own wife should be selected for the office of chaperon. Ilma, in company with Clari, was eclipsed; in such company as the present, she was somebody to be looked at; and Reginald trusted that, if his wife did spend her day in the milliner's quarter, the foreign lady would not be of the party.

'Dearest Fräulein!' gushed Ilma, in the German dialect of cosmopolitan Lindenheim, which somehow made Celia's heart feel warm; 'how glad I am to find you already. You see my little note has not been long before me. Monsieur speaks German? Nor madame? No? All the better; we can talk about—everything. Ah, one must be careful how one talks in these times. But never mind. I am so glad to see you again; and so proud.'

Nothing bewilders the humble-minded like flattery, nor had Celia as yet drunk that wine very deeply. Her recollection of Ilma was not very intense; it was not as if her old friend Lotte had turned up again in her life, and had hurried to fuss over her, and laugh her through her coming troubles. But no doubt she had under-estimated the comradeship of Lindenheim. No doubt all the brothers and sisters of that family were honestly as proud of one another as she supposed born brothers and sisters to be, for she rated family affection as highly as a beggar rates gold. She let Ilma kiss her on both cheeks wonderingly, but willingly, and was grateful even.

'So you are a real star!' Ilma went on, without waiting.

'Not yet,' said Celia, between a smile and a sigh.

'But you are—that is to say, you will be. I always knew it, from the first minute I heard you. I have been wondering where you were all these years, but of course it takes time to get known. Everybody has not Clari's luck. You know her, by-the-way, don't you?'

'I have met her; and I have heard her.'

'Yes. Well, you needn't be much afraid of her. She isn't what she was—she has already been hissed in Naples, and that shows the way of the wind. It is quite time we began to hear of somebody else than always Clari—Clari—Clari.'

'She is the greatest singer in the world,' said Celia, repeating her father's scornful judgment zealously. 'And she always will be. I shall never forget as long as I live what she made me feel. I am not afraid of her. You might as well tell a piping bull-finch to be afraid of a nightingale.'

There was more truth than she guessed in her comparison between her own modest voice, forced by art to be something that otherwise it would never have been, and that of her great rival, which all the empire of art had not sufficed to crush out of its own full nature. But Ilma stared and wondered a little, while Bessy, with eyes still fixed upon the bonnet, tried to remember the German-Ollendorff for 'Will you take a cup of tea?' and could get no farther than, 'I have the good shoe of the ugly man.'

Mademoiselle Krasinska had been for years in the art, as singers call their trade, but never had it happened to her to hear a rival praise a rival before—behind her back, that is to say. Celia was more cunning than she had given her credit for then, after all, or else a greater fool.

'Stuff!' she said. 'I know better. Clari is getting old, and knows it, and that puts her into a rage. She is as jealous and as envious——'

'Not of me, I'm sure.'

'Yes—of you.'

'Oh, don't say that, Ilma! But it is impossible—it is absurd. Why, she has heard me herself—she must know that I should never come within a thousand miles of her, if I sang for ever and ever.'

'Aren't you glad to hear you have made a woman like Clari jealous already? I know I should be—but luck doesn't come my way. I don't know why; I wasn't the worst at Lindenheim. But this is an envious world. One wants a great deal of luck to find justice anywhere.'

'No—you would not be glad. Oh dear—

I think everything is just hateful. It would be horrible to fail—now, but can't one just do what one must without that besides? Ilma, if I thought it was true that I could hurt an artist like Clari, and if it were not for the Cleopatra, I should just creep out of her way, and be glad to—anywhere.'

No; Celia was not cunning; it was painfully obvious that she was a fool. Ilma had made her experiment upon the quality of her friend's brains, and now knew how to deal with her.

'You are lucky to have got into Prosper's hands; he made Clari, you know. Really and honestly, she would have found no market without Prosper. He is the cleverest man in Europe, and he never showed himself so clever as when he dropped Clari and took up you. Yes, he knows what he is about, you may be sure. You see, he made Clari such a star at last that he had to give her her own terms—and that could never pay, for she thinks herself a second Malibran. He would have been willing enough to marry her, because then he would have got her for nothing, and made it her interest to play into

his hands—but he never could get her to see that, so he made her quarrel with him and so got rid of her. They say the quarrel was about eating oysters—but I know better. So you see what Clari's feelings about you must be. What is your scrittura? Of course you need not tell me if you don't mind; but a poor comprimaria likes to know such things.'

'Three hundred pounds for the season,' said Celia.

'Mon Dieu! Twelve hundred francs! No more?'

'That is all.'

'It is ridiculous—it is absurd—it is a humiliation. Why Clari would give you twice that if you got a doctor's certificate on the first night of your Cleopatra — three times, for anything I know. She is very rich—she does not sing for twelve hundred francs a song, even—not to speak of a season. The thing was done once in Prague, when Ranuzzaccia——'

'A doctor's certificate?' asked Celia, puzzled.

'That you have a cold, or a fever, or are

indisposed—don't you know? You go to a physician who is your friend, and have his opinion sent round the theatre. That is all.'

'You mean,' asked Celia, 'that Clari would pay me not to sing in the Cleopatra?'

Ilma smiled with sweet scorn.

'No,' she said. 'I mean that Clari, out of her kind heart, would not let you lose by your illness—nothing more. That is natural—is it not? Indeed, she as much as told me so.'

'No!' said Celia. 'She could not—she is the greatest artist in the world!'

Ilma smiled again—a little more scornfully, a little less sweetly.

'What has that to do with it? I suppose she knows her business best, and if she is right to be afraid. Why it would be nothing to what is done every day.'

Celia sighed deeply. It is a bitter moment, perhaps, just while it lasts—for it is soon forgotten—the bitterest in life, when the faith of a novice in the loftiness and purity of his chosen calling is first met by such realities as these. She did not love the faith to which her father had vowed her.

But her dislike was founded on reverence and humility—not on hatred for it, and far less on scorn. She honoured Clari as a great artist; she trusted Ilma—aus Lindenheim. Such an offer surely could not be serious. She would have been saved from disillusion by setting it down as a very poor joke, if she had been in the habit of living with people who ever jested. But, even then, the jest would have seemed profane as well as poor.

It was no breach of good manners to retire from pretending to take part in a conversation carried on in an unknown tongue; so the curate had for some minutes past fallen back upon his newspaper, while waiting for the call to be over, and Bessy upon a letter to her mother, relieved and inspired by studious glances at the white lace and ostrich feathers.

'And of course you know your own business best too,' said Ilma. 'Money may not be as much to you as it is to me. You have started at the top of the ladder; you have not had to learn the tricks of it, like those who have to climb. All the same, I would not take a paltry twelve hundred francs, if I

had to starve sooner; and anyway I should let Prosper know that he was not the highest bidder. You may be sure he is expecting you to threaten a strike at the eleventh hour, or he would not have cheated you beforehand.'

'I hope Prosper knows he can trust me,' said Celia, coldly.

'I think he knows you are a fool,' thought Ilma, beginning to be angry. It might not, after all, prove quite so easy as she had fancied a moment ago to deal with a fool who was such a fool as not to understand that twice twelve is twenty-four.

'The fact is,' she said, 'I am not older than you, but I have twice as much knowledge of the world. And I don't want to see an old friend ruin herself at the beginning of her career. I am behind the scenes; and I tell you frankly—for I know it—that you have made an enemy.'

'If money won't move her,' she thought, 'perhaps fear will.'

'An enemy?—I?—who?'

'Clari.'

Celia did need a protector; but of another

sort than John March or Bessy Gaveston. The very word 'enemy' made her turn cold; what had she to do with enemies—she, whose one purpose in life was to sing through an opera, for duty's sake, without breaking down, and had never sought to injure a living soul? She had none of the spirit that makes 'enemy' rhyme with 'victory' in stouter hearts and keener minds.

'Ilma,' she said eagerly, 'if it was for me to choose, I would no more sing in this opera than I would try to be the queen.'

'Yes; it is dangerous to make enemies; and Clari! You don't know her; I do. She will stop at nothing. If she chooses to crush you under her foot, she will buy up every critic and every newspaper in London; she will ruin your reputation; Mon Dieu, she will poison you if nothing else will do. She is the sort of woman who would send you a bouquet just before you went on the stage; you would smell it, and go mad, or die, or lose your voice for ever. It is all true—she has done such things. If you were a mere stranger, it would be my duty to warn you. Clari won't last long now, it is

true; and she knows it, and you may depend upon it that she means to die hard. I should not like to be her last rival, Celia; I should not like to have Clari's last stab before she dies.'

There was a touch of melodrama in her manner, a stage artifice caught perhaps from Clari herself in one of her coffee tragedies, that impressed Celia far more than her words. To see this girl in the fine feathers sitting calmly and talking of madness and murder as if they were everyday realities, was not likely to keep Celia's courage in at her fingers' ends. It was no scene out of a French comedy to her.

'Very well,' she said at last. 'Then——' and her brows drew together like her father's while her lips trembled—signs that Ilma misread as thoroughly as only a very clever woman can misread the symptoms of a very foolish one.

'Then you will not set yourself with that swindler, Prosper, against Clari? Well, you are wise. Whatever Clari may be, she ought not to be at the mercy of this wretched intrigue; for it is nothing more. You are wise, and you are right, too; and you will lose nothing, and have everything to gain.'

'You mean that Clari would do all you say?'

'And more.'

'She must do it then.'

'Are you mad, Celia?'

'I don't know, and I don't care. I only know that I must go through with the Cleopatra, and I will. I'm sorry for Clari to be my enemy,' she said, with half a smile. 'But I'll take care not to smell a single flower till the season's gone, and there are no more left to smell—out of Deepweald and Lindenheim.'

'There are other ways than poisoned flowers,' said Ilma, sharply, and well-nigh showing her hand. 'Do you know that Clari is a Jewess from the Roman Ghetto? I do, and that they have secrets there from which the saints guard us,' and she made a little gesture that might be meant for the sign of the cross, or might be meant for some heathen guard against witchcraft, or both together; for she was beginning to half believe in her own honesty. And all this for an imposture—a sham! 'Do you know what you are doing, Celia?'

'I am going to sing Cleopatra,' said Celia, doggedly.

'Ah, it is lucky indeed that I called! My poor friend, I see it all. You think you are going to do something very fine indeed—to sing Clari off the boards—and it does look well. But you shall not leap off a precipice without having your eyes open; you shall not sell yourself to a fraud—and for twelve hundred francs. Pah!'

'A fraud! What fraud?'

'Your innocence is just enough to drive one wild. One would think you had never been behind the scenes in all your days. I suppose you remember Herr Walter—Walter Gordon—at Lindenheim?'

Celia's lips had long ceased trembling; but she seemed to have forgotten her old trick of blushing, and her brows did not unfrown. 'Yes,' she said shortly, feeling as if the land were floating farther and farther away, and as if she were left alone upon strange waters in the midst of a storm.

'He has been in Italy,' said Ilma. 'Do you ever see him? Have you seen him since he has been home?'

'No.'

'I have seen him,' Ilma threw in, with a little jealous triumph for the sake of old times. 'I gathered that he saw you before he left England. Is that so?'

'Once.'

'Of course you have heard from him?' Ilma was reading her like a book now.

'No.'

'You have not guessed why?'

'No.'

'Ah, then I can tell you, if you care to know. Do you care?'

'No.'

'Then I will tell you, because you ought to care. He is a friend of Clari—a very great friend. Something more than a friend, some people would say. Everybody won't say it was mere accident for a young man and an opera-singer like Clari to meet at a little country-inn last summer, before going on—not together—to my Lady Quorne's next day. Such stories will get about, you know; and this one happens to be true. And it is true, too, that they came back to England in company—in the same packet.

And we knew pretty well what Walter Gordon was at Lindenheim. And so, being a friend of Clari, he set to work, and found out that the Cleopatra was no more composed by the man who calls himself Andrew Gordon than I am. There!'

Reginald Gaveston started round from his newspaper; Bessy from her letter. And no wonder; for both thought they knew Celia March as well as St. Anselm's spire. For the first time in her life Celia was in a passion; for the first time in her life Celia had found her tongue.

'I know nothing—I care to know nothing. I don't care to know why you have come to me. You have tried to bribe me, and frighten me, and to threaten me—and all to make me false to the only thing that I was made to live for. I suppose you will see Clari in less than another hour. Tell her, from me, that she may stab me through the heart if she likes, but that I will sing the Cleopatra while I have a note left in me. Yes, I will—now!—with all my heart and soul. I know what my father meant now, when he chose to set us two together against

all the world—himself and me, all alone. He may trust me now, you shall see. And tell her that I know what I am doing, and that if she thinks me her enemy, I *am* her enemy, and the enemy of all her world and all her ways. I may not be much, but I am a stone in my father's hand, and he knows best how to use me; he knows all things best, and Heaven forgive me for thinking—for feeling; and tell Herr Walter——'

Her eyes lost no light and her cheeks no flame; but her words came to a sudden end.

'Yes—I will tell! Bon jour, mademoiselle,' said Ilma, with a long curtsey that swept her out of the room. She had lost her own temper; and was wise enough to know that ill-temper is no match for open rage.

'Good gracious! What is the matter?' asked Mrs. Gaveston.

'Nothing,' said Celia. 'I have been learning the ways of my trade; and something about friendship—that is all.'

'Didn't she say something about Walter Gordon? He isn't in Ollendorff—but I thought I caught the name? Why how you

tremble! Who is Mademoiselle Krasinska?'

'Bessy—please, pray leave me alone. I'm not fit to go out with you to-day. I must stay at home.'

'Did you ask Mademoiselle Krasinska where she got her bonnet? Well, never mind. I shall remember it very well. But—if you really won't go out—and if you really don't want me—I won't lose the day. There, Reginald, you've pulled that whisker quite long enough, and the brougham's been ready these five minutes. Celia,' she asked timidly, anxious to escape from the storm, but not feeling sure that she was doing her duty as a chaperon, 'can I get you anything when I'm out or before I go?'

'Yes,' said Celia. 'It's on the piano, there, just behind you. Please give me the score.'

It might have been her father himself speaking through her in the familiar words that at last she had made her own. She knew her part but too well; but, closing her ears and eyes against all but the notes and an imaginary orchestra, and her brain against

thought, and her heart against all else, she studied as if she had never seen it before. The old dull weary sense of duty over-knew it; the new spirit had to learn it all over again.

In one word, she was fey—that mood when the dumb speak, the patient storm, the timid grow bold, the meek grow proud, and when all, leaving their true selves far behind them, rush forward to meet the end half way.

CHAPTER VIII.

BEFORE THE BATTLE.

NOTHING on earth or in air announced the advent of the great work which was to confound the Philistines, and make true Art live for ever. That day in May should surely have been charged with suppressed thunder, and men and women should have gone about their business with full hearts and troubled minds. But nature has a perverse way of her own. She will laugh at funerals, and weep at weddings, and refuses to feel in sympathetic excitement, even when a first child cuts its first tooth, or a hen lays an egg, or a young woman says yes—on the whole, she is used to such things. And the world at large has a way of imitating nature in this matter. It is

much to be doubted if even Lady Quorne, with all her artistic leanings, ate less breakfast that morning, or left undone anything that she would otherwise have done. Signs and portents come before convulsions and revolutions; and it felt strange to at least one person in the world, that the funds did not become frantic, and that the armies of Philistia did not turn the paving-stones of London into desperate barricades.

In a word, the day of the Cleopatra had come—at last, after six-and-twenty years.

For one man in the world the Future, with all its golden mysteries, had already come; it was worth having lost a whole lifetime to see this day. After all, great is Truth, and will prevail; and what work was ever worth its salt that does not contain, for a soul, the spirits of black days and fevered nights, and escaped shipwrecks, and starvation of body, and the breaking of heart and mind? Before light there must be chaos; and John March, as he rose that morning of mornings, saw and knew that it had been needful for his work to go through the same furnace that had melted

Palissy and Columbus, and a hundred such, into light and victory. His very deafness seemed like the sacrifice that Nemesis demands, lest all things should be too well. He felt strangely calm—so calm, that even he himself consciously wondered. His exaltation of spirit had reached such a point of heat, that it froze. Nothing was left for him to do. In the atmosphere of his masterful enthusiasm, the opera had reached such a climax of finished preparation, that nothing but intrinsic badness could make it fail; and that it was good, he knew, as absolutely as that he lived. What was it for, but to convert the world at once, and by storm? A general may be calm enough before battle when he is assured of a legion of angels to fight on the right side—that is to say, on his own.

Prosper called on him early, and said:

'They shall say it is so good than Comus, my friend. They shall say it is fine. Ah, it is marvellous, how well I put my finger on the right thing, and say go—and it goes. Ah, it wants more genius to make an opera go than to write one, my friend. I would find you a hundred of Verdi; but two of Prosper, no. I

will make you a Verdi—two of him, three of him, one hundred thousand of him, if I please ; but the Prosper, the impresario, he is born, not made.'

John March did not hear a word, but the sight of the man was intolerable to him on a day too great and sacred to be mixed up with the thought that even the highest genius has to work with common tools. Had it been possible, Cleopatra should have been performed in a building that should be a theatre and temple in one, without scenery, or stage business, or any vulgar trickery to rob the work of an iota of the glory that should be due to itself alone ; he would have had it thus, even though there might be a deeper fitness of things in a triumph gained in the very camp of the enemy.

But, though he was thus calm by very excess of exaltation, he could not rest through the hours that must yet pass before the first throb of the overture could be heard by all ears, except those of him whose heart had heard it for six-and-twenty years. So restless did he feel, that instead of spending the day, as he had planned, in solitary medita-

tion of thanksgiving, like a true knight before a triumphant ordeal, he put on his hat and went to see his daughter, like any common man. He had avoided seeing her as much as possible, for days, on principle. At least, he believed it was on principle. For he was the last man to understand, though very far from the least to feel, what really kept him from her, and made him leave her alone. But the painter knew very well who made Agamemnon hide his eyes from the sacrifice of Iphigenia. A man may hide away a heart somewhere, and yet condemn a girl to live without love, though it be her whole life, for what he holds to be a just and glorious cause; but he must be a fiend not to know what he is doing, and to feel it sting him now and then.

The curate was out; Bessy was writing letters; Celia was rehearsing silently, with her over-learned part before her for inspiration. Mrs. Gaveston's heart went into her slippers as her old singing-master entered—she no longer thought him mad, since Lady Quorne fully believed him sane, but he was becoming her mental substitute for a certain fancy picture of a being with horns, hoofs,

and tail, that had frightened her when she was little. His deafness, too, made her nervous, and it is certainly uncomfortable to try to talk to a deaf person whose ears are below the level of one's tongue.

He saw what Celia was doing, went up to her, and took away her manuscript from before her.

'I am glad I came. Forget everything—even when the time comes. If you think, you will fail. If your part has become part of you, as I hope, it must take care of itself now, and it will. You—you are a good girl, Celia.'

It was the first word of praise she had ever heard from him—the first word that had ever let her know that all her slavery had made her worth something in his eyes. And even this he slurred and hurried over, as if he meant nothing; and his hand touched her hair so slightly that the caress seemed but an accident, and very likely was one. She, too, was quiet enough, but not, like him, with the calm that lies above and beyond fever. He only saw the victory—she was to lead the forlorn hope that must go before.

'Mrs. Gaveston will not leave you to-day,' he said, without the least reference to what might be Mrs. Gaveston's own plans. 'She will see you to the house, and give you up at the stage-door. I shall not see you again till afterward. I have no instructions for you—nothing I could say would be of any use now. You know all that depends on you. I don't even know if I shall go to the house—I am sure I shall not, indeed. I won't have the composer of Comus pointed out in the middle of the Cleopatra; and I did not write the opera for deaf men. You won't sing any the worse for knowing that I am out of the way. And——' he thought of the last time he had entered a theatre—it was when Noëmi had defied him with rebellious song. 'No,' he said simply, 'I shall not go. My being there will not make or mar. It is out of my hands now; and so are you. I shall hear the result: and if I don't, I have done my part. I can do no more. Besides, I know. There can be but one end. Heaven does not seem to fight against the right and the true for nothing, Celia; it is that the true may triumph all the more gloriously. Think

of nothing all this day ; think only that you are leading in the whole future of Art, and that what that future is to be hangs on you—you only. Think of that ; think of that alone. If you do not fail, nothing can fail. But you will not ; it is impossible now. Yes, Celia, at last the time is come.'

Celia's heart felt full to bursting. Impulse made her hold out her hand ; but her father's eyes were far away, where his soul was, and her hand came back to her even more empty than it had gone. She never felt more awfully alone—she, a weak girl, who had just been told that the whole universe depended, henceforth, upon the endurance of her fever of strength for some twelve hours more.

Not only do years pass, but even days, and even hours. And, at last, not only the day but the very hour of the Cleopatra had come.

It is strange, if anything is ever strange, that all things in the lives of so many people should seem planned to keep the great work from the stage, and that all these very things should have resulted in this day and in this

hour. John March saw an overruling hand proved by an inevitable triumph, and knew nothing of the motives within motives and wheels within wheels, of which even the hidden actors behind the scenes were cognisant only so far as they themselves were concerned. But even he could not fail to wonder at the separate life which this work seemed to have taken, so that it had apparently produced itself, by an effort of its own will, as soon as it saw that its time had come. It was he who had been the passive machine—the work that had been the master-hand and the informing soul. Perhaps, in strict, literal truth, he had transferred his breath and spirit from himself into the dead work of his hands. Such things have been.

Meanwhile the house was beginning to fill fairly early. There could be no question but that the Cleopatra was of quite enough interest to fill to the brim, if not to overflow, the Parnassus, especially as the composer had no friendly clique to represent the public at large. Prosper knew his business too well to have let boxes or stalls lie fallow on a first night; but those who knew his business just

as well could see at a glance that it was Cleopatra herself who had drawn, and not her manager. Or it might have been the prestige of Comus. But in any case, people had paid to come, and had paid early. Every air in Comus had been whistled and ground for weeks past, and that profitable and honest sort of ear, which seeks out the music that tickles it most easily and pleasantly, was there in unusual force for a first night. But another class also was represented strongly. The old-fashioned critic, whether amateur or professional, who prides himself on having heard everything that was, is, or shall be worth hearing before anybody else was born, held to their tradition of the original production of Comus at the old Phœnix Theatre a generation ago as a first and foremost article of their operatic creed, and claimed Andrew Gordon as one of themselves. There were among them many who remembered Comus as having been popular by a sort of accident, and in spite of deserving to become so. His return to the stage was to them the return of dead days.

Then there sat Lady Quorne already, and

unfashionably long before there was any need of her presence. She was something more to-night then the mere fanatica per la musica. It was she who had discovered the new English prima donna, whose coming success would be a part of her own. It was at her house in Park Lane that the great Prosper had made what was like to prove the crowning hit of the season. In effect, the whole affair was her own; and she had already made Cleopatra the fashion before a note of it had been heard.

Walter Gordon went to the theatre. The days had not been standing still with others, but they had been absolutely standing still with him. It is easy enough, it was easy enough even for himself, to set him down as having failed in strength and courage. But what was any man of merely common human strength and courage to do? It is all very well for a knight-errant to go riding about and saying 'I will.' There was the woman he loved with all his heart in the hands of an ogre, and she had refused to let him help her. As he was not a hero of fiction, and therefore not gifted with an inordinate capacity for

misunderstanding, he was learning to understand Celia better simply by dwelling upon the whole of the past, and reading her last letter to him by its light. What can one do with a heroine, whose father condemns her to a loveless life for Art's sake, and who accepts her destiny with an obstinacy equal to his own? It may be that the daughter of Jephtha had a lover; but if she had, he did not hinder the sacrifice. And then, if, as was most likely, this father of hers was not Andrew Gordon at all, but a robber, or an impostor, who had sold himself for bread to a charlatan like Prosper? That would not make him love Celia less, but it would make it ten times harder to rescue her from the clutches of one who was not only an ogre but a knave. And if he could prove John March an impostor—as he could not—how, even for the fame's sake of his dead uncle, could he expose the father of Celia? While, on the other hand—but what helps it to go over the hopeless and helpless labyrinth of reason and counter-reason all over again?

Perhaps the opera itself was a sham, and the fragment remembered by Clari only a waif

left by his uncle and incorporated by John March in his own work to give colour to a lie. His passing glance at the score in Saragossa Row had been enough to show him that at any rate the bulk of Cleopatra was as unlike Comus as two operas can well be. But once more, 'perhaps' helps nothing. Perhaps he had better have stayed at home in his studio. And so, though bitterly enough, he went. There is no need to say why.

He, also, arrived rather early; and presently, while looking round the house, he saw himself recognised by the great people; namely, Lady Quorne and the Gavestons. To give her cousins room in her box, if she could not give them a cure of souls, was the least she could do for them; and it is doubtful if Bessy would have felt prouder of a deanery than of being in a real opera-box with a real peeress of the realm. If Miss Hayward could only see her there! But Miss Hayward would hear of it; and to have been in an opera-box with a peeress is not among those joys which lose their flavour by keeping. In that respect it is like that thing of beauty of which she had heard at school. He would

have contented himself with bowing, but the countess motioned to him to come to her. He did not remember that he was himself an artistic lion that night—that he was no longer merely Walter Gordon, the portrait-painter, whom a great lady could patronise, but the nephew of his uncle, and therefore in a position to patronise a lady who thought that she thought little of her coronet in comparison with a sprig of laurel. And she was, perhaps, more honest in such a faith than people mostly are.

'We shall have a grand success to-night,' she said, as proudly as the bellows-blower to the organist. 'I only hope she will be in good voice; if she is, she will be divine. Where is your uncle? I have been looking all round the house for him. He is a wonderful man. Please bring him to see me between the acts, if he will come.'

There was nothing for Walter to do but to make some sound which might pass for anything but 'No;' since he could not, then and there say, 'I will not bring you the man who calls himself Andrew Gordon.' Bessy was studying her libretto, in which the Italian adap-

tation from Shakespeare was printed, beside a re-adaptation into Anglo-librettese ; a strange dialect ; perhaps the strangest in the world.

'Yes ; he is a wonderful man,' said the curate. There was nobody like him in Deepweald—nobody. Nobody could make him out ; so I always felt sure he was somebody. It is a pity he is so deaf, or he would be organist there to this day.'

'Ah, I forget his deafness,' said Lady Quorne. 'What an awful affliction ! There is no wonder, after all, that he should have kept himself so long retired from the world. I wish I had known all about it sooner ; and the idea of his losing his place for a misfortune ; but you parsons'—she had become lately something of an esprit fort—'are sometimes very hard-hearted. I mean you, Reginald. You would have turned Bach out of the Thomas Kirche—not that I ever heard of his growing deaf, but Beethoven did ; and if you would have turned out Bach, you would have turned out Beethoven. I wish I had known. The Cleopatra would have been out years ago. Who knows what you have made the world lose ?'

'It wasn't me,' said Gaveston. 'It was the dean and chapter. Indeed, I may almost say that he owes his good fortune to me.'

'To you? Why if I had not found out that his daughter had a voice——'

'I should not have brought her to Hinchford otherwise,' said Gaveston, since for everybody, from Prosper downwards, to claim the laurels of the Cleopatra seemed the order of the day. 'I had always taken the greatest interest in her from a child, She was a most interesting girl.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Bessy quickly, feeling that to contradict a countess on her own ground is scarcely the road that a man of tact should take to her favour. 'Who is that lady in black velvet and diamonds—over there, in the box near the stage? I'm certain I've seen her before.'

Lady Quorne took aim with her opera-glass.

'Ah, then she is here! Then it is a success indeed. I never knew her to go to hear another artist, at least in England, in my life before.'

She bent towards the opposite box gra-

ciously, but a little guiltily, for she was there as the patroness of a new star; that is to say, as a rebel to the old. The lady in diamonds bent in return, but haughtily, thought Bessy, and without the ghost of a smile. She ought to be twice a duchess at least, perhaps a princess, to return so royal a salute to Lady Quorne.

'Who is she?' whispered Bessy to Walter Gordon, who was just then close to her shoulder.

'That is Clari.'

'What—whom we heard at Deepweald when I was a girl? Of course it is—to be sure; and the black velvet and all. But she wore pearls then.'

It was Clari; and never had even Ilma known the waning star to be in a more bitter mood. She could read the house like a book, and saw that the triumph of Prosper and Celia, of Cleopatra and Andrew Gordon, was a foregone conclusion. She could see that the world had come, not to judge, but to applaud. Jealousy, wrath, and life-long hatred did not compose a mood, but a passion. If

the heart can commit murder, she was a murderess, and felt like one. Prosper had conquered her, Celia had eclipsed her; the eagle was about to die of the sting of a wasp and the peck of a sparrow. But that was nothing: she might have swept away these with one wave of her wings. It was that she felt her throat twisted and her heart pressed by the hand that had grasped her life in the beginning, and had only relaxed its hold for awhile to crush her with tenfold force at the end. What mattered it that Andrew Gordon, whether deaf or dead, could not witness his triumph over her with living ears and eyes? She knew well enough that his work was his living soul—demons do not die. She had never dreamed that, when his time came, he could not strike even from beyond the grave. Wasp and sparrow were but the little things that destiny chooses for the instruments of her great ends—always. She sets free a volcano to destroy a hamlet, but she only waves a feather to sweep away a throne.

She, also, looked round the house: but neither man nor ghost could she see—only a crowd of hands that were presently to pro-

claim her her husband's crowning victory. She had only lived in the hope of avenging her life upon his soul, and of destroying his child, his work, for the sake of hers—the only creature whom she ever had a chance of loving in all the world.

'There is Walter Gordon,' said Ilma. She felt ashamed of herself and her baffled mission; but she thought it time for somebody to say something.

It was just then that Clari met the bow of Lady Quorne; but she answered not a word.

'He is with Lady Quorne,' said Ilma.

Clari turned her head, and seemed to swallow up Mademoiselle Krasinska in the scorn of her great eyes.

'Will Miss Celia appear?' she asked icily.

'She is in the bills,' faltered the unfortunate failure. 'Yes—for all I know.'

'Yes. Will she be in voice?'

'Giulia! How should I know?'

'That is to say she will. Ilma—you have disappointed me. You are a fool. I always knew that—but fools have their use, and you are a useless fool. Do you want me to speak in words? Prosper is not a fool—he would

understand a look, a wave of a fan. Very well. I speak then. This opera shall fail, even now. I can do nothing. Perhaps you can do nothing. I will not blame you if it succeeds. But, per Bacco e la santissima Madonna, if it does succeed, I will punish somebody, and there will be nobody left to punish but you.'

'Giulia! I did all I could. I went to Fräulein Celia——'

'Who cares what you did? I don't want to hear. I don't want to know.'

'Giulia! It is not fair.'

'I do not want to be fair. What is the use,' she asked, with double scorn, 'of a comprimaria who cannot sing, if she cannot intrigue? Ah, if I could only strike her dumb with a look—but I cannot see to-night; if he is deaf, I am blind. No; I have no help—not even you.'

Ilma's diamond hopes had long since faded into air. But it was not loss of hope that made her shudder. She, also, hated the new star; and she felt the vengeance with which she had threatened Celia recoiling upon herself, and her awe of Clari was deepening into

superstitious terror under the intense voice and the passionate eyes. It was the eleventh hour—yet could nothing even yet be done?

Nay, it was the twelfth hour. Before she had asked herself half her question, the conductor raised his bâton, and at last, in one sudden, thundering chord, the Score had become Sound!

CHAPTER IX.

THE WEIGHT OF A BOUQUET.

If the Cleopatra was in truth a living creature, with the whole soul of a man in her, it must have been a wonderful sensation when, after all those past years of patient darkness, she felt herself at last throb out into daylight; when she stretched out her limbs, as it were, and heard herself, and could say at last, I am. The overture was not precisely the sort of music that people had come to hear. It was not in the least degree like the introduction to Comus, to which it was fully expected to be a repetition. But then nobody, in those simple, pre-æsthetic days, listened to an overture—any more than one would think of reading a preface to a story-book—until it had

been well ground into their ears by the street-bands. The overture to Cleopatra may be recommended to modern audiences, and may be revived with advantage, for it is as old, as strong, and yet for always as young as the hills. The most æsthetic may profess enthusiasm and inward comprehension over the results of its elaborate science, without being guilty of any very criminal amount of hypocrisy, or being driven to find beauty in ugliness to save themselves from the charge of Philistinism. But those were dark and evil days, before form and tune had come to be held the accursed things which the children of light are bound to believe them. The Cleopatra had both; but in such wise as to be a set challenge to all existing ideas of either. This is its secret history—not its criticism. It was as if the composer had thrown it down before the world, saying: 'This is good, right, and true; if you like it, all the better for art; if you don't like it, so much the worse for you.' One or two critics noted a severe self-denial about this opening, as though the maker of it had, instead of seeking anxiously after striking effects, deliberately avoided them even when

they were most obvious, so that it might consist in all of art and in nothing of artifice. But, with these one or two exceptions, it passed—just as might have been expected. The house applauded at the end to show its sense of relief that the fiddling was over, and that the singing and seeing was going to begin, and justified its applause by saying 'splendid,' and 'beautiful.'

The librettist, no doubt inspired by the composer, had followed the English tragedy with such severe fidelity as to double the difficulties that his master had to encounter; for of all the great plays, perhaps Antony and Cleopatra is the last that a modern musician would choose, as it stands, to work upon. Perhaps for that very reason it had been chosen by Andrew Gordon. His purpose had been, not to combine a series of detached airs and concerted pieces by means of an interesting story, but to express one great passion by all the resources of music, and to show all that art can do when concentrated upon one single end.

To any one present—and there was not one—who could have read the secret history

of the opera in the overture, it must, according to his temper, either have been a colossal joke, or a profound stroke of pathos, or both combined, that all this artistic passion, with the whole blood of a man's whole life in it, should have been brought with such a flourishing of trumpets and beating of drums before such an audience, and just as a mere piece of theatrical claptrap and operatic intrigue. Everybody was waiting patiently for the first catching tune and, a little impatiently, for the débutante; for a living woman, whom one can hear with one's eyes, is naturally more interesting than what one can only hear with one's ears. And, presently, she appeared.

That operatic manager must know his trade a great deal worse than Prosper, who cannot secure a triumphant entry for his prima donna, even in London, where the claque, as an organised institution, is unknown. But, to a prima donna herself, all applause is genuine, however it comes; and Clari turned pale while her rival stood trembling in the middle of the stage. Ilma felt as if she were enveloped in a frown; and

Celia's welcome was not the less gall to her, because to her the new star was no rival. To Celia herself, all was pitch darkness; she neither saw nor heard. She needed all her strength, and found none.

But it was not stage fright. No soldier ever led the way into a breach with more self-forgetfulness. It was only that a greater burden was laid upon her than any creature could guess or bear: without a hope or wish for herself, without confidence in her power, without the élan of high spirits, to have to justify her father's whole life to the world, while morbidly conscious all the while that the slightest failure was the only sin she had ever been taught to fear. It had seemed an easy thing for her father, with whom to wish meant to will, and to will meant to do, to bid her send thought to sleep until its proper hour for waking. She had tried to obey, and the result was a tension of brain, throat, and heart, that would have been a divine fuel to genius, but felt like despair to Celia, who had never known how to rise to any occasion since she was born. She had but the fuel without the fire, and knew it only too well.

But there was no time to yield, and she opened her throat with the precision of a machine. She could have sung her part in her sleep, and she had just escaped the point where memory relieves nature by taking flight altogether. Had John March himself been there, and could he have heard, not even his exigent ear could have detected a flaw. There was none to detect; not even a waver in the first note that came from her. But a chill fell over the house at the very first bar. Ilma's eyes were hanging on the face of her offended patroness, and saw the frown relax for a moment, but only to deepen again.

'I'm afraid she is nervous,' said Lady Quorne, at the end of the recitative. But nobody answered. Bessy was absorbed in thinking how she would feel in her friend's place, and Walter Gordon was actively hating the whole world and himself for being there, or anywhere. He began to know what she must be suffering, now that he was beginning to understand.

But presently matters began to mend. After all, the flame of genius is not so com-

mon a thing as to be missed when it does not come, and those who failed to be pleased with the débutante must have been hard to please. Not much has been said of Celia's voice, either in singing or in speaking, because there was not much to say beyond the not uncommon facts that it was strong enough to fill a moderately-sized house like the Parnassus, was very sweet, very clear, and as true as gold ought to be. She was not much of an actress, and looked very little like Cleopatra—that is to say, like a woman whose very presence is a fascination. She could no more carry away a house metaphorically than she could literally. But her style was faultless; she was no more Cleopatra than she was Clari, but nobody could say that she did not know how to sing. And so, in spite of her heavy heart, things went better and better till the first act was over.

Beyond question, Cleopatra was to be no failure. But the music was over the world's head, and the prima donna outside its heart—that also was clear. In critical slang, the history of Andrew Gordon's two operas

would be recorded as a succès d'enthousiasme followed by a succès d'estime; it was as if a giant, after boasting that he was going to kill a thousand at a blow, should succeed in killing three—which would have been a triumph if he had confined his boast to the killing of two. It is a failure when a work intended to effect a revolution is simply—praised.

But, meanwhile, and for the moment, success was success; and as yet nobody was bold enough to whisper: 'But we came to hear a second Comus; and this is not a second Comus, after all.'

Walter Gordon's heart sighed with relief when the curtain fell. There was one act gone out of the four. He was just about to return from Lady Quorne's box to his stall, when he caught the eye of Ilma Krasinksa from the other side. She made the most of the meeting of eyes by beckoning to him unmistakably; and, not being in a mood for resisting straws, he changed one box for another, simply because he was bidden.

'After all,' Ilma was saying, 'I don't know that Fräulein Celia's failing would

have done much, one way or the other. If the opera had broken down to-night, it would have been mended again. There are a dozen women who could make as much effect as she is doing.'

'No!' said Clari. 'There is not one—not one in the world. There is not one but she who would not have broken down at the third bar—no, not one in the whole world. I know what she has gone through to sing the notes; it is everything to sing it at all. You think anybody could sing what sounds so easy? That is because you are a fool, and because they are all fools. Try to sing it, and see. Do you think Prosper would have found another soprano in an hour—in a month—in a hundred years? It does not do to sing that part at sight—and he has not three slaves. I tell you if she had not sung ——but it is too late now. I will not any more tell you you are a fool. I am tired. I am glad to see you, monsieur,' she said to Walter as he came forward. 'It is kind of you to come to say good-bye.'

'Good-bye?'

'Why not? It is a common word. Yes;

I cannot afford Como, or Lago Maggiore, but I shall retire. I shall not sing this new music; I am too old to learn, and I do not care to be hissed in London. I shall go where they are behind the age, and will not want a worn-out old woman to break her throat in pieces to please them. Thank you, monsieur. It is good of you to come and see me on your way to where your heart is. Yes—I know. You need not stay longer than you please.'

'I certainly expected more voice,' said Ilma to Walter, thinking to throw a sop to jealousy. 'They would not think much of her at la Scala.'

'Voice!' said Clari, bitterly. 'Andrew Gordon treats voices as he treats lives—what do you think he cares for either, if it is a woman's, so long as it can sing one note for him? It is a miracle she has a voice at all. And I am told she was not taught by Andrew Gordon!—bah!—as if I did not know every trick and every turn. Ah, he may be dead a hundred years, for I am a hundred; but he was her master, dead or alive.'

Walter thought himself too well acquainted with the natural history of the musical profession to take heed of a prima donna's jealous fit, or of any words she might say therein. Indeed, he was not heeding any words, or the theory that Andrew Gordon alone could have been Celia's master might have struck him more forcibly. As it was, it hardly even passed through his ears.

'Lend me a pencil, if you have one,' said Ilma, suddenly.

He handed her his pencil-case, and she leaned back idly in her chair, and for some minutes amused herself by scribbling with it on a fly-leaf of her libretto, while he occupied himself with feeling himself helpless, even in so slight a thing as speaking some commonplace word to Clari. Presently Ilma, without returning the pencil-case, handed him a little folded-up note, torn from the fly-leaf, and left the box.

He read: 'She is in a temper, but please stay in the box through the next act; I'll tell you why, after.' It was the same to him in what part of the house he might be, and he stayed.

Ilma had not come back to the box when the bell rang and the curtain rose upon act the second, and upon the determination of the audience to find in it all that they had looked for from act the first and had not found. The new act was a crisis; the success of Cleopatra was assured, but the scales to weigh its triumph were balanced so exactly that a straw would turn them. And anything short of overwhelming triumph would mean failure, from the composer's point of view.

But this second act had not proceeded very far before the chill returned. It became less like Comus than ever. It was all divine art, and as stern and cold as it was divine. It contained, or seemed to contain, not one throb of the passion that made Cleopatra herself the mistress of the master of the world. Was it the composer's fault or Celia's? That, there were no means to tell. Perhaps it was body without soul; perhaps too purely spirit without some voice-genius to give it human heart's blood. The composer, and his librettist, threw the burden more and more upon the soprano as the opera went on, and Celia never

flinched or wavered in her strict faithfulness to every note and every shadow of tone. Every accent received precisely its just emphasis, and every phrase its due proportion. There was absolutely no fault to be found in her—and faultlessness is the unpardonable sin. Difficulties had been piled up sky-high for her to conquer, and she conquered. But the difficulties had been so cunningly hidden by the artist's hand that made them, that the hearers knew nothing of them or of the equal art that had conquered them, and only felt that one lapse into simple song would be worth them all.

Celia only felt that she was doing her duty, resolutely, to the end. She was recalled, but carried off no bouquets. The time for those which had been bought with Prosper's money had not yet come, and Lady Quorne's friends and followers did not feel enthusiastic enough to spare their own.

Ilma had returned to the box when the curtain fell for the second time.

Prosper received Celia behind the scenes.

'That woman is in the house,' he said fiercely. 'She is come here for harm; I know

her; and I know not how, the things go not well. You must do better this next act, mademoiselle. You must make the house to tumble down. You shall not mind the music —you shall stamp, you shall go mad, you shall make a noise. Who is this Mademoiselle Krasinska who come to wig me the ear while you sing? With her stupid questions—bah! as if I stand here to chatter. I thought it should be a challenge to the box with pistols from madame—foi de gentilhomme; I keep not the list of her lovers for her, I. La Donna è mobile—bien fou qui s'y fie.' He seemed to be speaking of Clari, whose name, alone among prime donne, had never been coupled with a lover's until Ilma had spoken scandal of her to Celia about Walter Gordon. But his mongrel rendering of the villainous old couplet was plainly enough directed to Celia herself, to tell her that he, Prosper, had been leaning on a broken reed. For a manager, who feels that he has made a mistake, is strangly like ordinary mortals in passing on the blame.

'What exquisite phrasing!' said Lady Quorne, true to her colours.

'What exquisite lace!' said Bessy. 'Why, it must have cost a fortune a yard.'

'Lace?' said Lady Quorne. 'Surely, no. But—yes, it is. It is the lace she wore in Park Lane; though she wore it in the Spanish fashion then. But it's not very correct, I am afraid. I don't think Cleopatra could have worn lace made by Spanish nuns.'

Bessy appealed to her encyclopædia. 'Could they?'

Gaveston pulled his whiskers, and thought of the Mahrattas. 'They might have found it in the Pyramids; they find all sorts of old things in things of that kind. And there was Penelope.'

And Celia's lace, worn scarf-wise, might have been Penelope's own web for beauty. Prosper did not think much of an anachronism that interfered with such an addition to the charm of song as a piece of costume that would have befitted a queen who drank solution of pearls; Celia was no chronologist; and her father looked down upon costume as one of the vulgarities and profanations to be swept away. It was not everybody who understood

lace, but they were more than those who only understood music, and the lace sang to them, while the wearer, in the third act as in the second, continued to do her duty bravely.

But not quite so unflinchingly. Ilma Krasinska had been behind the scenes; and, though nothing seemed to have come of it, it was certain that she had not been there for nothing. Celia, for no reason, and therefore all the more intensely, felt herself wandering among unknown pitfalls; the opera was not over yet, and there was many a bar yet to come before the climax that would save or destroy it once and for all. She was beginning to feel terribly alone; even the face of her father, could she have met it, would have given her some sort of desperate strength—at least, she fancied so. She instinctively put out her hand, not as a stage gesture, but as if she hoped to find some support in the air. It seemed as if she were singing herself out of life, and fading away with the score into the flare and glare of the footlights. Once she seemed to be in Lindenheim—it was a vision, not a fancy; and it seemed to her as if she had never been there in the flesh, but had

dropped into it for the first time. She could even see Walter's face above her in the air; but it was beside Clari's.

Suddenly she was startled by a burst of applause.

What had she done? Nothing, surely, beyond singing the close of an air. She turned and bowed, seeing nothing. Then the first orchestral chords came that precluded the scena upon which all hung, and called for all her strength of throat and mind.

It was preceded by a long symphony which gave her space for the recovery of her senses. No wonder they were waning—their strain had known no real relief since she had been born. She drew back, after her bow, towards the back of the stage.

As she moved backwards, her first bouquet flew over the orchestra, sideways, and fell just before her. The tenor raised it, and handed it to her with a bow and a smile.

'"Un biglietto? Eccolo quà!"' he hummed sotto voce from the Barber of Seville as he gave her at the same time a three-cornered note, on paper that seemed torn from a book,

which had fallen from among the red and white flowers. Instead of putting it into her bosom with an answering smile, she opened it; read it; the orchestral symphony guided her back into song; and the score, which she knew in her sleep, became as blank as if no John March or Andrew Gordon had ever been born. A sharp, swelling pain drew the sides of her throat together; and her eyes, drawn upwards among the gods, where none would dream of seeking him, saw the face of John March meeting hers with a look, not of anxiety, not of reproach, but of despair, while she stood in dead, helpless silence, with the bouquet at her feet and the unfolded note in her hand.

The conductor's bâton called Halt, and beat backward. Such mischances will happen now and then. But Celia was as dumb as stone; and though the white, despairing face far above her could not hear the silence, it could see.

What more can be said? It was his own soul that had been struck dumb.

Clari turned round to Ilma—a look of malicious pride told her that her tool had proved sharp in her hand after all. Neither malice

nor pride came into the face of the prima donna, but a sullen calm. She fanned herself slowly and royally, as she took the whole house into one steady gaze.

'Ah!'

She, too, in that sweeping look caught the agonised face of her master—the face she had not seen since it had glared at her the first time she had ever sung, and had stung her into fatal rebellion. Her eyes seemed to hang upon its torture. No matter what had been the means, she was grandly avenged. His soul had been killed before her very eyes, and by her own hand.

'Celia!' hissed Walter from behind her. He had been comprehending more and more. 'I must go to her. And there is her father!' The dead-white face drew his quick eyes too.

'Her father?' asked Clari.

'Yes, there. But I must go.'

'Her father?'

'Yes, there.'

'Andrew Gordon?'

The fan was closed, her hand was on his arm, and the question was like a cry. She turned fiercely round to the stage, and leaned

forward with her whole life in her eyes. It was she herself who had last worn the lost lace of Il Purgatorio upon the stage; and it was Andrew Gordon's child who was wearing it now. The face above her said:

'You robbed me of the only love I ever gave to woman! you have crushed the only creature you ever loved. I am avenged.'

Meanwhile Celia read, in the air, between her father's face and her own, the words that had struck her dumb: 'You shall not sing. You are Andrew Gordon's daughter. Ask Prosper who was Andrew Gordon's wife; he tells me she was named Giulia Clari. She is here. Look at your mother while you sing; and sing if you dare.'

'I don't think you need be much afraid of Cleopatra now,' said Ilma, with sweet stupidity.

Clari threw Walter's arm away from her, and, without thanking Ilma by so much as a look, swept out before him into the corridor.

CHAPTER X.

'ARIA DIVENGO, E FUOCO.'

JOHN MARCH had been absolutely earnest in his resolve not to be present at the first performance of Cleopatra.

It would have been too intensely painful; and, therefore, by a law as certain as that of gravitation, he found himself hidden away in an obscure corner near the ceiling of the theatre when the conductor's bâton fell for the first chord. Nobody was likely to look for him there, nor were the gods likely to recognise the composer in this queer intruder among them. His will not to be present had only proved strong enough to make him skulk in like a criminal, to witness the triumph of art and his own glory.

It was more than pain—it was a hideous sensation when dead silence followed the first fall of the bâton. He could follow with his eyes the blasts of the brass, and the sweep of the bows, and the gestures of the conductor; it was like a nightmare, well known to experienced sleepers, in which one dreams of and strains after inaudible sound. It was all acted before his eyes, it all lived in his brain, but there was no link between the silent action without and the silent music within. The whole air seemed heaving with a Cleopatra that would not come, or rather that died before it had time to be born. And yet the brass was blown and fingered, and the strings were swept as if by an orchestra of madmen, as content as the sane are to waste their energies in doing nothing. Or it may be that even such would be the hidden music, everywhere about us always, but pitched too high or too low for our senses, if our eyes could be opened while our ears remained closed. There, however, sat John March—alone unable to hear one note of the music that he himself had made.

Were it possible to hear with one's eyes,

he would have heard, for he listened with them intensely, trying to see the sounds. He knew his own work too well to lose his place or his way one moment among all the complicated bars. Perhaps in truth he did hear better with his dead ears than the house at large; but it was only as a waking ghost may be called more alive than a sleeping man. The overture ended. He saw a faint fluttering of hands; but what did it mean? In his solitary visions that close had been drowned in a thunder of applause, proclaiming sudden victory; he had seen the evil spirits clapped out of the temple windows, never to return. It might be so, for all he knew.

He dared not ask a question of any chance neighbour, for he would have to demand a written answer; and what should a deaf man be doing at an opera? Suppose, however, anybody should address him? For the gods are as sociable as their inferiors in the stalls are otherwise. He had no need to be afraid, however, for the god must have been sociably disposed indeed who would have tried to get up conversational entr'acte with such a neighbour. But, for fear of such a chance, he

would not let his eyes wander, and kept them, till the curtain rose, consciously upon the chandelier.

Was it triumph? Was it defeat? One or the other, and that supremely, it must be—no moderate success could be the destiny of the Cleopatra. Nothing unheroic could be its destiny. Lost in his corner he watched hungrily through two acts, and watching Celia in a growing agony. He knew, when he came, that he was courting unendurable pain—the concentration of his whole life into three terrible hours. He tried to translate every movement of her lips into sound, that he might compare it with the ideal perfection which the deaf man, among the whole house, was able to hear.

And so he listened with all his eyes till the critical third act was half through. Then, just before the grand crisis itself, he saw the tenor hand Celia her first bouquet. And then!

What happened then? He saw the false orchestral start—he saw Celia standing before the flaring footlights as if petrified into dumbness; he saw the house flutter; what could it all mean? His neighbouring gods

were craning over the railing, and many of those below were rising in their stalls. Surely Celia had not broken down now—that would be too tragic a jest even for destiny. He, too, half rose from his seat and leaned forward. No; it was no common fiasco; no ordinary turning of swine to rend a giver of pearls. It was the utter, ignominious failure of the only possible Cleopatra in the whole world of song. The great work was strangled while being born.

His whole soul turned faint and sick. His will felt paralysed; and, if it had remained to him, what could he do? He could not swoop down among them all, and by impossible magic call the dead work back to life again. That minute while Celia stood mute felt petrified into a century. He could have cried out in his despair. No mere baffled artist has seen what he saw—the defeat of Art for ever because a girl had lost her voice or her memory.

How long did it last?

All at once, a woman swept forward across the stage. At least she looked like a woman;

unless they wear black velvet and diamonds in the spirit world. Was it Cleopatra herself come straight from dead Egypt to vindicate the glory of her own tragedy? It might have been. For a real moment she stood silent and calm, though even from so far off he could see her bosom heave. Then she made the slightest sign with her arm—half to the house, to command a hush; half to the orchestra. There was no disobeying; the house became hushed, and the orchestra began once more.

He saw that she sang. And then, before the last notes of the great scena had died upon her lips, he saw a storm. We know what no mere instinct could tell a man who had not seen Noëmi Baruc since she was a child—it was she, not Celia, who alone in the whole world could sing Andrew Gordon's Cleopatra; something more was wanted than to sing the notes in tune and time. The grand voice which had hitherto wasted itself in singing for diamonds seemed inspired, and swept away the house in a whirlwind of song. Divine Art was spreading the wings of a diviner Nature, and scattering flame as it flew.

Ears need not hear to catch the electric thrill of such a fire; he could see; and as yet he could not wait to question. Perhaps that voice, so used for once, would have turned the veriest trash into glory; perhaps, after all, the Cleopatra, for all its skill, deserved to fail. Or perhaps the great voice required the highest art of its highest flying—who can tell, or need care to tell? After all, Cleopatra was made to sing; not to plod through with poor Celia's tired throat and weary heart, but to soar over, as in free air, and to pelt the hearers in flying with its thorny phrases as lightly as if they were flowers. Even those who knew her best, Lady Quorne, Ilma Krasinska, Prosper, did not at once recognise the waning prima donna in this sudden meteor. Her voice failing — she growing old? If this was sunset, sunrise is but a feeble thing, and noontide nowhere.

Such a storm as followed this unlooked-for and inexplicable intrusion is not known in a century of song. The suddenness, the contrast, the completeness of triumph struck all alike, until the whole house had but one heart, and that was Clari's. Not only did

her voice work like magic, but her presence was a spell as she stood and sung, not acting, hardly stirring indeed, but letting music rush on without guidance to its full tide. Art must have been there, but it was as if she were herself creating the music as it came. Every note was a heart-beat; and every beat was answered in unison. Yes—surely John March had been not Andrew Gordon; he had been Pygmalion, Prometheus. He had made, not a score but a soul.

> Portatemi il diadema—col mio sangue ;
> Desij divini sorgono dal cuor;
> Aria divengo, e fuoco—

It was Noëmi Baruc whom he heard!

It was for her voice, and no other, that he had given his Cleopatra song; her voice only that had sounded through his ears while he dreamed of all that song might mean; her voice, of which Celia's had been but the echo and the shade. It was even thus he had heard it sung—no, not thus even in his fullest dreams. He had dimly guessed, but never knew, all it would mean to hear this great work of his, his whole mind, turned into life

by the voice which had inspired all its best—the voice of the one woman whom in all his days he had ever loved, and that so much as to make him hate her very name. For when love calls itself hate we may be sure that it has never died. And now she, who had betrayed him to the Philistines for gold, was turning the dreams of darkness into daylight truth and more.

It was no dream that he heard. He had felt a bewildering rush, as a torrent of water, through his ears and his brain, and then the voice of Noëmi followed ; the same, only fuller and richer than of old, even as this woman who sang was statelier and more queenlike than Noëmi.

But that she, of all humankind, whether in the body or in the spirit, should have come to take the burden of the battle of Art from poor Celia's feeble fingers! Through what roads had they gone to such an end? The years might shrivel away till five-and-twenty years ago became closer than yesterday ; but this was a greater miracle. Had she been defying his once more living ears with the melody of some stock opera—but that she

should be filling them with Cleopatra, and in this wise! He clung to the rail in front of him, bewildered with his new-found sense, which could hardly bear the strain. He was in the shadow of the Colosseum once more, only with his vision fulfilled.

Aria divengo, e fuoco—

Yes, it was indeed all flame and air, and he felt his whole soul flying, forgetful of all common life, he knew not where or whither. But this was Noëmi, and this was Cleopatra, both in one.

When he opened his eyes again, he was no longer among the gods in the gallery. But wherever he had flown, it was not to any heaven yet higher. He was in an inferior refreshment-room, in the upper regions of the theatre, surrounded by strange faces—and by strange tongues too; his ears were still unclosed. He was stretched on a hard bench, with a bearded Frenchman at his head, and a long-haired German at his shoulder—for the musical gods are of many nations—and a British barmaid with a glass of brandy at his

side. There were indeed too many Samaritans from a medical point of view, for a man in a fit is sure to draw. Something had happened to him, he knew; something bewildering, strange. But he had neither strength nor courage to seek for any link wherewith to bind his vision to reality. Had it ever been? He closed his eyes, and turned his face from them all. If it were false, let him at least hold to it one minute more. But —yes, that was true, if all the rest of the universe were a dream and a lie.

'Stand back there, if ye please,' said a harsh voice, roughly. 'Where is the man?' The man, still clinging to his wonderful dream, neither looked nor moved, though he felt his wrist held firmly but gently. He could not know the voice; but the touch did not feel quite strange. All his senses were coming back, quivering like over-strained strings. Then another hand paused for a moment over his heart, and he was let go. 'Somebody must go for the manager,' said the same voice again. 'Give him this,' And he wrote a few words in pencil. 'And you'd better all go back to your places. I'll stay here.'

The Cleopatra was not over, then? But that mattered little—if the spell had not been broken, it was in safe hands. Even as he lay there, with closed eyes to keep the dream in, he could hear his own music through the door, and, now and again, a voice sailing as a ship on its sea. And the applause seemed never to cease, but only to rise and fall, like a wind in the night-time.

'What is all this?' said another voice. 'A man is vanished? I am no medicine. What for do you send for me? Send for a cab, and I shall pay.'

'I am a surgeon; my name is Muir, and I sent for you. Are you the manager?'

'I am—Prosper.'

'This is Miss March's father. She cannot come to him here.'

'Ah! Yes; that is he. Then he shall die; yes, if he shall. What the diable makes the deaf old fool in this gallery? Yes; I shall tell you, and I shall tell all the world, that have ears, that he and Clari have conspire. Miss Celia! Bah! she is not worth her salt; I shall make a box for her ears. Ah!——'

He had not been drinking; but he was plainly in a towering rage. He clapped his hands to his own ears, to keep out the noise of the waves which were the sea of Heaven itself to him who had made them. What did such a victory mean to him? The triumph of Clari, to whom he must go down on his knees, and whom he must re-engage on her own terms.

'Yes,' said Muir, quietly. 'But, meanwhile, he must be carried where his daughter may come to him.'

'You shall dictate to me in my own house? No!'

'Yes,' said Muir, still more quietly. 'And you will help me to carry him, if you please.'

Something in the surgeon's tone made Prosper look at the surgeon's hands. They were larger and heavier than even an angry man would care to feel. Muir passed one arm round the patient and raised him.

'No; I don't think I need trouble you to help,' he said to Prosper. 'Only go first, and lead the way; and let it be so that none of the play-people see us as we go.'

'I wish he had broke his neck!' raved

Prosper. 'But never mind; he is a cheat—he is a fraud! I shall tell all the world. One shall know how they conspire, these English! Yes; one shall know. I tell you,' he announced to the world, as at present represented by Muir and the barmaid, 'that they conspire. I shall prove my words; it is a gang. The public shall not be made a fool. He makes a part; he teaches his mistress behind my back; he makes his girl break down; his mistress is there! Ah! it is well arranged!'

John March opened his eyes.

'There goes the last,' he said, 'in the shape of a lie!'

And even while he spoke, a new blast of applause swept along the passage and through the door, as if, indeed, the last of the unclean spirits of folly and falsehood, whom it was Cleopatra's mission to conquer, had flown to its own place.

Prosper was in no mood to notice miracles. He who could only see a vulgar fraud in a sublime self-assertion of nature in the face of all conventional things was himself deaf and blind. But Muir forgot all else—the folly

that had drawn him from his books after Celia's voice, even the immediate need of the moment; he could only say, in quick speech, that contrasted strangely with his common drawl:

'You must have lied hard to make him hear. Why, neither Maurel nor an earthquake would have done that; but Nature's a terrible wonder! When did you hear?'

'How can I tell? Send for Celia.'

'Yes,' said Muir absently. 'The human ear is a wonder,' he began, as he easily carried the musician's small and wasted body down back staircases and along corridors. 'Perhaps it is the most wonderful thing in the world. I'd give mine, and welcome, to understand them. I wish I'd thought, when I had ye under my fingers, of giving ye a good sound blow with the side of a book or the palm of my hand. Some shock ye must have had—and that a big one—to clear the meatus internus; for I'll swear the serous secretion, if that was the mischief, gathered no nearer than that to the membrana tympani. Maybe a pistol fired off at the auricle might have broken the thing; but that might have

broken the drum as well. It's best as it is; but why Nature should be so fond of getting us into scrapes, unless for vanity, just to show how cleverly she can get us out again, is very hard to say. Sometimes I think she's a physician; and then, again, I think she's but a fool. And, maybe, it's not so hard to be both —not at all so hard.'

Not without cause had the old anecdote come into his mind; for was not he himself a physician? And was he not also a fool? Wise men do not crowd up gallery stairs to listen to voices that they have taught themselves, by dint of philosophy, to despise.

But that was only a passing thought. The possibilities of what may happen in the inaccessible labyrinth of the internal ear were more than enough to absorb his thoughts to the end of the last corridor—what sudden spasm of muscle or nerve, and under what conditions, might have freed from the burden of years the most delicate and the most mysterious of all created things. After all, what was even Celia's voice to the ear of Celia's father? It should be nothing, any way; for who could tell on what spring of discovery the surgeon

might not be putting his finger—of discovery that from his prosaic point of view would serve the world better than a thousand Cleopatras or other such bundles of idle song? None observed the queer procession as it moved to the region of the house behind the curtain—the enraged impresario stalking in front, and the gaunt Scotch doctor carrying the grotesque, dwarfish figure of the musician as if it were a child's. Prosper led them to his own room. Muir laid his patient on a sofa; but John March sat up, and once more said, 'Send for Celia.' Muir started from his own mental travels—there was such a strange note of satisfied triumph in his voice, such a strangely weary look in his eyes.

Meantime, while the composer thus hovered between earth and air, the Cleopatra swept on gloriously to its close. There was no doubt about it now—there had not been since the true Cleopatra had taken her rightful place upon the stage. Whether the work was to live or die, that night would live for ever. It seemed even to Noëmi that she had never sung in her life before; she knew she had

never sung as now. All the hidden and stifled genius in her swelled up and out. There are those who look back upon that night as their one night of song. She did not stop to think of what the magic could be that compelled her to sing the hateful and hated Cleopatra, to save it from ruin, and to crown her arch-enemy with glory. It was her arch caprice of them all. She only sang right out and right on till the curtain fell over the last chord, and left her at once the proudest and humblest woman in the world.

Was it simply for her lost child's sake that she had done this thing, after all?

Not one person on the stage spoke to her when the curtain fell. There are times when a whole firmament lies between us and the common world. Prosper was not in the way; not even Ilma came to her behind the scenes. The fire was still upon her; she did not begin to think how she was to meet the baby whom she had lost in another world. Her heart felt too full even for the old hunger; too full even to feel alone. She had forgotten even to look for the face that had summoned her from above, as by a spell, to the stage.

She was gathering up her black velvet and passing alone through the wing when she was stopped abruptly; and she recognised her acquaintance of Saragossa Row.

'Madame,' he said, 'where can I find Miss March? Where is she?'

'Miss March?' she asked dreamily.

'Yes—she must be found; I don't know this place; she must see her father at once; there may be no time to lose.'

Noëmi leaned against the wood-work, and felt for her fan.

'Her father? No time?' She was trying to comprehend common words.

He thought she did not understand English.

'Where can I find Miss March?' he asked in French. 'I must find her instantly. Her father is very ill.'

'Her father—Andrew Gordon? He is ill?'

'Very ill, madame.'

'Ah, gran Dio! Yes; take me; I will come.'

'I must find Miss March—his daughter—madame. For God's sake—if you know this

place—tell me where she is to be found. There is no time to lose.'

'Gran Dio! Do you not hear! I will come—now!'

'To find Miss March? Then let us lose no time.'

'No—no! To find him! Now!'

'Pardon, madame. His daughter——'

Then the soul of Noëmi Baruc went back into the body of Giulia Clari, and—swore.

'Corpo d'un Cane! I am his Wife, monsieur.'

CHAPTER THE LAST.

AFTER ALL.

I.

Muir might have spared himself the pains and the wasted time of searching for Celia behind the scenes. The news of her father's sudden illness flew fast enough; rumour and gossip knew their way about those back stairs and twisted ways better than a Scotch doctor. It came to her in her dressing-room, where Bessy Gaveston had hurried to her at the instant of her collapse upon the stage; and it was brought her by Walter Gordon, in whom a little of his old omnipresence seemed, for once, to revive. He spoke to Bessy at the door; Bessy told Celia by throwing her arms round her neck and crying, without words.

'I have killed him!' cried Celia.

'He has nearly killed you, you mean!' cried Bessy, as fiercely as a young hen. 'No; John March isn't the sort of man to get killed; I wish he—I mean I wish others were as unlikely. You must come, though, if it's only because of what they'll say in Deepweald. Duty's always disagreeable, you know, or else where's the merit?'

'Oh, it isn't that—but how should you know? But I must come—if it is only to let him curse me before he dies.'

'Come too!' whispered Bessy to Walter, as they passed him on their way into the passage. The chaperon felt as if she had been chosen by Fate to lead a victim to an ogre, and clutched instinctively at the first semblance of a man she could find by the way. Walter signed to her that he would not leave them, and then drew back into the dark to let them pass before him towards the manager's room. He knew but one thing on earth—that it was no time to speak to Celia then. The time for his arm to give her strength was gone; gone all the more surely that no man ever longed with a fuller heart that he had not let it go.

So it happened that Celia entered Prosper's room hardly half a minute after Muir had left it in search of her. Till she came in with Bessy, followed by Walter, nobody was there, during that half minute, but Prosper himself and John March, or Andrew Gordon; we may call him now as we will. He half raised himself at the sight of her, while Prosper, who had the air of a gaoler rather than of a nurse, stood scowling with thunder too intense for explosion. But it was not the enraged manager whom Celia feared. She knew nothing of what Cleopatra's fate had been; and if failure alone had killed her father, what untold death would the cause be, if he ever came to know—if that poison in the bouquet were not a lie! She burned to throw herself at his feet; and she could only stand trembling at the door.

'Celia!' he said eagerly, 'did you hear the end?'

Was it cruel sarcasm, or was his mind wandering?

'No?' he answered for her. 'Then you have never heard the Cleopatra—you never will. Heaven forgive me, for thinking I could

make a soul. This is their doing; the stars were wiser than I. I understand nothing; I only know that art has triumphed to-night for ever and ever. From this night, we have no more to do with it, nor it with us any more. Let those who gained the triumph keep the glory. I have done my part; you have tried to do yours; now we will go and live in peace, for even the arch-enemy has become the arch-prophetess of the light, and given it the victory. It is a wonder and a mystery; but so are all things—none less, none more. You know to what I vowed you from your cradle; and to-night I set you free.'

Could he be dreaming of triumph in the midst of despair? Had she brought upon him even worse than death, and left it to Nature to solace him with madness as the only comfort left for life to give him? Could she do nothing, not one least thing, for him, in all her days, but turn away, and leave him to the consolation of a madman's dream? She even longed for his reproaches—they would have been her due. Just twice in her whole life, and twice only, the veil had, for

one passing moment, been lifted from between the hearts of the father and daughter, so unlike on the surface, so alike in the depths that are out of eye-reach; but now the same force seemed at once to tear in pieces her heart and the veil together. She could hold herself no longer; she threw herself on her knees before him.

'Father!' she cried out; 'oh, if you could only hear—oh, if you could only know!'

It was the whole of the life, crushed by his hand, that cried out from her. He had never heard with his heart. He had never known. If he had, surely their two lives would have found room for love as well as duty; and the love would not die between them because all else had died. That he could not hear her cry was but a symbol of deeper things. For the voice is the soul; and if his ears had not been closed, Celia's soul must have reached into his heart and told him all that might have been.

'Celia,' he said, very calmly, 'I do hear—I do know. Yes; I hear. God was good enough to let me hear the end. Do you wonder? It does not seem strange to me.

I have been blind, not deaf, Celia. Do you understand? No; you cannot. At least, not all. There is no need. But—if you knew how I have crushed my own heart in trying to give you a soul—you would forgive me, if you knew.'

'Father! I forgive you!'

'Yes; you would forgive me, and you do. And it is not too late. One can no more crush a heart, thank God, than one can make a soul—by one's own will—unless, maybe, one's own.'

'Indeed, I did my best. But, do you know? Is it true?'

To Prosper on his hearth-rug, to Walter Gordon and Bessy Gaveston in the doorway, perhaps to others who were listening with their eyes, the two were talking in an unknown tongue. But it was not so.

'Then, you did not forget? Your voice did not fail?'

'Is it true that she is——?' She handed him the poisoned paper, which had never left her fingers.

'It is the one secret I would have died with—but—yes, it is true. Listen to me,

Celia. No there is no need for us to be alone. There may not be too much time, and we have been alone only too long. Your mother—you have thought I loved nothing on earth but the score, no—I loved your mother, Celia, with all that there was of me to love any creature in the world. I had found her in Rome, a mere voice without aim, or form, or sound. I destined her for such glory as had never been the lot of woman. I believed that I had transformed her into a soul. But,' he said, facing round upon Prosper, 'she was bought like the rest; and when I found her transformed, not into a soul, but into a Clari, I knew what alone had to be done. For Art's sake I must turn love into hate, and tear from my own breast the soul that I had planted there. I was right, Celia. Never for one moment have I doubted that—not one,' he said, with hurried defiance, as if all things depended on his denial. 'But never for one moment have I doubted that she, and she alone, was made for the work I had to do. You do not know what it means to have crushed the love of your life for Art's and Truth's sake.'

Had she not? She sighed, but he did not hear the sigh.

'That is what I have done. I have saved Art from her, and you from her; and now, by some strange path, she has been given back to Art, and you are her child—hers and mine. You may see her now. Perhaps I wronged her a little; I suppose it hurts a woman more than we know to lose her child. She will do you no harm now; you are free, and she has atoned. As for me—Noëmi!'

Celia started round—there stood Clari in her black and diamonds, grand and calm. But neither so grand nor so calm as the musician, as he raised himself still higher on his couch and bowed, like an ambassador to a queen.

'I thank you in the name of Art, madame!'

But what were the bewildering mazes through which the artist's yet darkened, perhaps darkening brain was still groping, what Celia's wayward battle of old and new emotions to the real woman who had at last found herself, after all these years? He thanked her in the name of Art, and bowed. She cried out, 'Andrea mio!' and threw her-

self at his feet, clasping both his hands. 'Ah, you have hated me, because you loved me? I know what that means—I know. And we have hated each other, you and I, as only we could hate, and have never loved but each other in all the world; and now we know, corpo del centesimo cane, we know now——'

Italian flame and oriental fire recked nothing of time, or place, or standers-by; the woman who had had all things but love, had heard that she had been loved with the whole of love all her days; and she believed because she knew. She alone had a soul large enough to comprehend what all had heard. What had she not lost—what might not have been? Even now, the dregs and lees of life might be worth the draining, though the full sweetness might be gone. He had been her tyrant, but he had loved her; he had sacrificed her to an idol, but he had loved her only; he had robbed her of even a child's love, but he had loved her always. Muir would have dared most things for medicine's sake, but even he kept aloof as this woman, with all her tragedy turned to nature and set on fire, guarded her master with her arms.

As for him—triumph had come to him, but Noëmi had come back to him. And he said:

'Nunc dimittis, Domine . . . . . for mine Ears have Heard Thy salvation . . . Bring me my Score.'

II.

Here, I take it, this voyage in somewhat strange and unfamiliar waters of life comes to a natural end. There are points and lines beyond which ships can sail, but no pen can follow them; I mean the waters of death, though they are familiar, and not strange. Whether the force of habit called for the vocal and instrumental parts of the thing called Cleopatra, or whether the opening inward eyes of the musician caught infinite possibilities of new scores in new worlds, where the stars sing aloud for joy in their courses, not even the omniscient Prosper could tell. It seems enough, not that John March died in the glory he had lived for—that was nothing—but that he died in the arms of Noëmi; understanding and understood by the only hearts that cared for him, or for whom he cared. If it was but for a moment

—even such a moment is more than comes to most men between cradle and grave. 'Call no man happy till he dies?' Rather call no man unhappy till he has lived; and John March least of all.

Lady Quorne and Ilma Krasinska, the Parnassus and Prosper, Cleopatra and Clari, Lindenheim and London, fade back into dreamland. But the old gray tower of Deepweald, whence this voyage of souls began, still turns to rose in the sunset; and round its highest mouldings, and among the elms, the rooks still curl and caw, making finer harmonies than Cleopatra, sweeter songs than Clari's. I cannot tell if the great work, made under its shadow, had revolutionised the world. I think not; for the world is not so easy to turn upside down, even in the matter of a song. Vulgarity, buffoonery, æsthetic affectation, cliquism, Prosperism, fashion, and cant, are fairly able to hold their own, and have as yet shown but few signs of dying; and it is good they should live, for it is good to fight them. Enough that one stout soldier died in the faith that the fight was won. But, however it might be, and may be, with the

world, Deepweald, after three whole months, was still—Deepweald. Mrs. Swann and Miss Hayward had not called a Dorcas meeting to petition Parliament against the misuse of semi-grand pianos, and to indict Mr. Lucas, their highly respectable and efficient organist, as a charlatan.

Nor, as yet, had the curate of St. Anselm's received a mitre in recognition of his wife's compliance in looking after the health and morals of a prima donna. He was curate of St. Anselm's still; and, indeed, was in all things the same, except in having two new guests under his roof: Hope, and Celia.

It was not out of complaisance to the caprice of a countess that Bessy Gaveston had taken Celia home with her to Deepweald. It was just out of her own sweet nature and good heart, because Celia had no friends, and nowhere to go, and not enough pride or independence to stand alone, when the whole rock whereon her life had been built was shattered at a blow. The only thing that was not strange in life seemed to her terribly strange. For the first time she was both in Deepweald and at home.

Is it very terrible to say that she mourned, at heart, for her father less than if he had not been a tyrant, whose whole love for her had been shown by trying to turn her into a machine? Slaves may honestly mourn for their masters; and Celia mourned with her heart even more than with her eyes; but it was as a slave after all, and as a slave set free. Such grief is honest; too honest to affect impossible depths of feeling. But she did better than mourn for his loss, which was no loss; she understood him. And if the great soul, set free from its narrow body, was still conscious anywhere in the world, it might have been amply content with such mourning.

Mrs. Swann said: 'How easily she takes it, to be sure!' Mr. Swann said: 'No wonder!' Bessy said: 'It is because she feels too deep for tears.' They were all wrong. It was because she knew.

On Sunday morning, Lucas, the organist, was hurrying over a late breakfast in the parlour sacred to the memory of Cleopatra. The ghost of the grim old organist would have lost itself in the orderliness that reigned

in that Augean stable. And yet Lucas was no Hercules—he was only a married man, with a tidy wife who believed in dusters. It was too near church-time to expect callers. But one came; an old visitor from Lindenheim.

'Why—Herr Walter! What brings you here?'

'Why not? I knew Deepweald before you.'

'Mrs. Lucas—Mr. Gordon. And Breakfast—Mr. Gordon, if you will.'

'Thank you; I became intimate with breakfast hours ago.'

'Then I'll have the pleasure of introducing you to dinner in a few hours. Meanwhile, you shall come to church, and hear me play; though I can't promise you Fritz Meyer to blow. You remember Waaren?'

'Thank you; but I've heard you play.'

'But not here.'

'Yes; here. The first time you ever played in Deepweald.'

'What! when I played to Clari, and thought it was my Lady Quorne? That was a fearful joke — worse than Waaren.

By-the-way, you know Clari? What's become of her? I never see her name in anything.'

Walter both frowned and smiled.

'Nobody knows Clari.'

'What! you don't mean to say she's——'

'Bah! I mean I thought I knew her once; but I didn't. She made a tremendous hit last season, and has engaged herself to Prosper for the remainder of time. That's all. She's singing in Tobolsk, or Sumatra, or Paris, or somewhere, for a fortune a night, and is allowed to eat oysters by the bushel.'

'Oysters?'

'Yes; I believe she is Cleopatra, and dines on pearls.'

After all, it had been the dead baby, the text for vengeance, whom Noëmi Baruc had loved; not the grown-up girl. It was true; and what had Giulia Clari to do with Celia March, after all? Romance itself has not the magic to make a prima donna, for more than one night, live backward twenty-five years, and to be as if roses and diamonds had never been. She to settle down, and rest on the love of a girl, who had been the empress

of an emperor! Who was still, and more than ever, empress of that greater world—the stage! Not she. Diamonds are immortal, and the love for them never dies. But she, too, understood the master-soul of them all; and, doubtless, he understood her, too. And henceforth, under all her moods, she had a soul, faithful to her light, which was—song.

Thinking of these things, and of some others, more suitable to the place than may appear, Walter Gordon took his seat in the chancel; and there in the middle of the middle benches, he looked for and found Celia. For what else was he there?

It had not struck him that she would naturally have been at St. Anselm's. Where else should John March's daughter worship, but where her father had made praise rise up in such music as the great cathedral would never hear again? She lingered a little after the rest. He joined her at the south porch under the elms.

'You have had my letter?' were his first words.

'Yes.'

'And——?'

He half held out his hand, but she said nothing, and did not move even a finger.

'Celia, do you remember what I asked you that afternoon by the Thames? You did not say "Yes" then. I let it slip, like a fool; you would have said it, Celia, but I always let everything slip, like a fool. But never again. Say "Yes," Celia!'

Still no word.

'I am not taking you by surprise. I wrote. You knew what I would come to say. I told you I know now what I never knew, your glorious self-devotion, your—— Everything that makes me feel the meanest sham alive. I want you to make a man of me. I have never been a man; I have been a fool. Let me learn strength from you. Celia, when you came to Lindenheim I saw my one woman of all women, and I did not know it; I went on following false lights and their shadows. I let others help you. I let even poor Muir starve himself for days to find you gloves, while I—Heaven forgive me!—I went wandering off abroad, thinking—I shall never forgive myself for what I thought of

him who is dead, and you. Is a man never to be pardoned because he has not seen the light till the eleventh hour? I am not a strong man, Celia; I am not wise; but I love you with all my heart and soul, and shall, and must, for all my days.'

Why had he not said so months ago? Celia's blushing days were past; but the white rose has its own away of blushing, and of bending to the wind.

'Do you remember Lindenheim?' said she.

'Do I remember the heaven that I saw, and passed by on the other side?'

'You know who I am? A wretched stage failure—a——'

'Hush! I know that I love you, that I want to marry you, and that there is none but you, your own self, to say "Yes" or "No." Say—which is it to be?'

She did not think: 'What will they say in Deepweald—he rich, and I poor!' She put out her hand—under the elms.

'Is that "Yes?" Celia—I believe—I swear that I have loved you, down in my real heart, ever since we walked through the

Rosenthal! And you have loved me—is it yet one minute? Is it—— ?'

She put her hand into her bosom, and drew thence what might have been a bunch of violets—once upon a time.

'How long have I kept these?' said she.

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD, SURREY.

S. & H.

AT ALL BOOKSELLERS'.

BENTLEY'S FAVOURITE NOVELS.

Price 6s. each, in Crown 8vo., bound in Cloth.

ABOUT THREE HUNDRED THOUSAND VOLUMES HAVE BEEN SOLD OF THE WORKS CONTAINED IN THIS SERIES.

A LIFE'S SECRET.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

ANNE HEREFORD.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

A SISTER'S STORY.
BY MRS. AUGUSTUS CRAVEN.
Translated by Emily Bowles.

—o—

AT ODDS.
BY THE BARONESS TAUTPHŒUS,
Née Montgomery.

—o—

BESSY RANE.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

BREEZIE LANGTON.
BY HAWLEY SMART.

—o—

COMETH UP AS A FLOWER.
BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

—o—

COMIN' THRO' THE RYE.
BY HELEN MATHERS.

—o—

CONSTANCE SHERWOOD.
BY LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

CYRILLA.
BY THE BARONESS TAUTPHŒUS,
Née Montgomery.

—o—

DENE HOLLOW.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

EAST LYNNE.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

EDINA.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

ELSTER'S FOLLY.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

EMMA.
BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

GEORGE CANTERBURY'S WILL.
BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

GOOD BYE! SWEETHEART!
BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

—o—

HER DEAREST FOE.
BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

JOAN.

BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

—o—

JOHNNY LUDLOW.

BY AN ANONYMOUS AUTHOR.

—o—

LADY ADELAIDE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

LADYBIRD.

BY LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

—o—

LADY SUSAN.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

LEAH: A WOMAN OF FASHION.

BY MRS. ANNIE EDWARDES.

—o—

LORD OAKBURN'S DAUGHTERS.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

MANSFIELD PARK.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

MILDRED ARKELL.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

MRS. HALLIBURTON'S TROUBLES.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

NANCY.

BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

NORTHANGER ABBEY.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

NOT WISELY, BUT TOO WELL.

BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

—o—

ORVILLE COLLEGE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

OSWALD CRAY.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER.

BY MRS. ANNIE EDWARDES.

—o—

PARKWATER.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

PERSUASION.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

QUITS.

BY THE BARONESS TAUTPHŒUS,

Née Montgomery.

—o—

RED AS A ROSE IS SHE.

BY RHODA BROUGHTON.

—o—

RED COURT FARM.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

ROLAND YORKE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

SAINT MARTIN'S EVE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

SENSE AND SENSIBILITY.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

STEVEN LAWRENCE: YEOMAN.

BY MRS. ANNIE EDWARDES.

—o—

SUCCESS: AND HOW HE WON IT.

BY E. WERNER.

Translated by Mrs. Christina Tyrrell.

—o—

SUSAN FIELDING.

BY MRS. ANNIE EDWARDES.

—o—

THE CHANNINGS.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

THE HERITAGE OF LANGDALE.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

—o—

THE INITIALS.

BY THE BARONESS TAUTPHŒUS,

Née Montgomery.

—o—

THE LAST OF THE CAVALIERS.

BY AN ANONYMOUS AUTHOR.

THE MASTER OF GREYLANDS.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

THE SHADOW OF ASHLYDYAT.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

THE THREE CLERKS.

BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.

—o—

THE WATSONS.

BY JANE AUSTEN.

—o—

THE WOOING O'T.

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

—o—

TOO STRANGE NOT TO BE TRUE.

BY LADY GEORGIANA FULLERTON.

—o—

TREVLYN HOLD.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

VERNERS' PRIDE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

—o—

WHICH SHALL IT BE?

BY MRS. ALEXANDER.

—o—

WITHIN THE MAZE.

BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

"*One can never help enjoying* 'TEMPLE BAR.'"—GUARDIAN.

MONTHLY, PRICE ONE SHILLING,

THE TEMPLE BAR MAGAZINE.

TO BE OBTAINED AT EVERY BOOKSELLER'S OR RAILWAY BOOKSTALL,

Containing 144 pages.

"*Who does not welcome* 'TEMPLE BAR?'"—JOHN BULL.

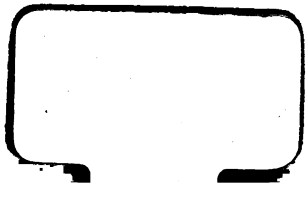
"'TEMPLE BAR' is sparkling and brilliant. It might command a constituency by its fiction alone, but it takes so much care of its more solid matter, that if there were no stories at all there is enough to interest the reader."—ENGLISH INDEPENDENT.

Besides many others, the following Serial Stories have appeared in the pages of TEMPLE BAR:—

The New Magdalen. BY WILKIE COLLINS.
Red as a Rose is She. BY MISS BROUGHTON.
Lady Adelaide's Oath. BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.
The American Senator. BY ANTHONY TROLLOPE.
The Two Destinies. BY WILKIE COLLINS.
Leah: a Woman of Fashion. BY MRS. EDWARDES.
Uncle John. BY WHYTE MELVILLE.
Aurora Floyd. BY MISS BRADDON.
Ought We to Visit Her? BY MRS. EDWARDES.
The Frozen Deep. BY WILKIE COLLINS.
Patricia Kemball. BY MRS. LYNN LINTON.
Good-bye, Sweetheart! BY MISS BROUGHTON.
A Vagabond Heroine. BY MRS. EDWARDES.
John Marchmont's Legacy. BY MISS BRADDON.
The Poison of Asps. BY MRS. ROSS CHURCH.
The Wooing O't. BY MRS. ALEXANDER.
A Race for a Wife. BY HAWLEY SMART.
Archie Lovell. BY MRS. EDWARDES.
"Cherry Ripe." By the Author of COMIN' THRO' THE RYE.

And many others.

Advertisement Office, 8, George Yard, Lombard Street, E.C.

RICHARD BENTLEY & SON, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

Publishers in Ordinary to Her Majesty the Queen.